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Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación y Desarrollo Humano

Traducción del libro “Utopía” Libro II de la serie Beale Group

B.R. Herron. Págs. 102-152

Proyecto final de graduación presentado como requisito para optar
por el título de Licenciatura de Inglés con énfasis en Traducción

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DEDICATION

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Introduction

Translation plays a fundamental role as a means of communication in today's world, as it allows interaction between people who speak different languages. Through translation, it is possible to share ideas, knowledge, and experiences among different cultures, facilitating global understanding. In addition, it provides access to information in areas such as education, science, literature, and business. Without translation, many important works could not be understood outside their original language. It also promotes cultural exchange and mutual respect among societies. For this reason, translation is considered an essential tool in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

On the other hand, translation techniques play a key role in the translation process, as they allow the meaning of a text to be accurately conveyed from one language to another. These techniques help solve linguistic and cultural difficulties that may arise during translation. Through their application, it is possible to maintain the style, tone, and intention of the original text. In addition, they allow the adaptation of expressions that do not have a direct equivalent in the target language, ensuring that the message is clear and natural. The proper use of these techniques guarantees a precise, coherent, and high-quality translation, which is essential to achieve the communicative purpose of the text.

The purpose of this final project is to translate at least fifty pages of the book *Utopia*, written by Herron, specifically from page 52 to page 102, applying various translation techniques that demonstrate the knowledge acquired on their proper and functional use. Through this project, it aims to show how the implementation of different translation techniques influences the preservation of the meaning and content of the original text, achieving a faithful and understandable translation in the target language.

This project is structured into three main chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical framework of translation, including the fundamental concepts and the main techniques used in this process. The second chapter includes the translation of pages 52 to 102 of the original text, organized in two columns to show both the source text and the target text. The third chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations derived from the translation process, as well as the main challenges faced and the solutions applied. Additionally, a glossary of key terminology used throughout the project is included. Finally, a bibliography and an annex are presented to complement the information developed.

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First Chapter

1.1 Antecedents

Translating books is essential because it allows knowledge, culture, and ideas to cross linguistic and cultural barriers. Through translation, readers from different parts of the world can access stories and perspectives that would otherwise remain unknown to them. Book translation promotes cultural understanding and empathy by exposing readers to diverse histories and social realities. It also helps preserve literary works and ensures they reach wider audiences. In academic contexts, translation supports learning, research, and critical thinking. Additionally, translating books contributes to globalization by connecting societies through shared narratives. Without translation, many important voices would remain unheard.

B. R. Herron is an American author known for writing speculative and science fiction novels that explore social, political, and ethical issues. His writing often focuses on themes such as race, power, justice, and the future of humanity. Herron uses futuristic settings to reflect real-world problems and provoke critical reflection in readers. He is recognized for combining advanced technology with strong social commentary in his stories. Through his novels, he challenges readers to question systems of inequality and governance. His work appeals to readers interested in dystopian and utopian narratives. *Utopia* is one of his most significant works.

Throughout his career, B. R. Herron has demonstrated a strong interest in imagining alternative futures shaped by social change. His background influences the way he presents complex political and cultural conflicts in his writing. Herron's characters are often placed in morally challenging situations that reflect real societal struggles. He uses fiction as a tool to discuss issues such as oppression, leadership, and collective responsibility. His storytelling style blends action with philosophical reflection. This approach allows readers to both engage with the plot and analyze

deeper meanings. Herron's work continues to gain relevance in discussions about justice and equality.

The book *Utopia* was written by B. R. Herron and is part of The Beale Group Series. It was published in the United States and contains approximately 265 pages. The novel is categorized within the science fiction and speculative fiction genres. *Utopia* presents a futuristic vision of society shaped by political decisions and technological advancement. The setting of the book plays an important role in developing its themes. Herron carefully constructs the world to reflect both hope and conflict. This information helps readers understand the context in which the story was created.

Utopia presents a future where African descendants receive reparations and form a powerful new alliance called the New Union. This alliance is built on advanced technology, social organization, and economic independence. As the New Union grows stronger, the United States faces economic decline and internal conflict. The story explores political tension, global power struggles, and ethical dilemmas. Leaders must make difficult decisions to protect their people from war and deadly viruses. Technology plays a crucial role in both protection and control. The novel shows how progress can bring both hope and new challenges.

A major conflict in the novel arises when a global virus threatens humanity. The New Union uses advanced technology, including shields and nanotechnology, to protect its population. However, these solutions create moral questions, especially regarding the isolation of children. The book shows how fear and survival can justify extreme measures. Characters struggle between protecting the future and preserving human values. Political leaders face pressure from both internal and external forces. This part of the story highlights the cost of security and control.

The novel also focuses on younger generations who grow up under strict protection systems. These children represent the future of the New Union and carry high expectations. Education, discipline, and technological enhancement shape their lives. One central character symbolizes hope and transformation for society. As the story progresses, tensions increase between the New Union and the rest of the world. Conflicts over resources and power become inevitable. The book emphasizes how the future depends on the choices made in the present.

Utopia contrasts prosperity and suffering across different regions of the world. While the New Union thrives, other parts of the world experience war, poverty, and disease. This contrast raises questions about responsibility and global inequality. The novel suggests that isolation can protect but also divide humanity. It explores whether true utopia can exist when others are left behind. Herron challenges the idea of perfection by showing its flaws. The story encourages readers to think critically about justice and cooperation.

The main purpose of Utopia is to explore the consequences of power, technology, and social reform. The author aims to question whether a perfect society can truly exist. Through the story, Herron highlights issues of inequality, leadership, and moral responsibility. The book encourages readers to reflect on real-world political and social systems. It also warns about the dangers of control, exclusion, and unchecked authority. At the same time, it presents hope through unity and innovation. Ultimately, Utopia invites readers to imagine a better future while recognizing its complexities

1.2 Justification

Translation is important for intercultural communication because it allows ideas from one culture to be understood by another. In the case of Utopia, translation helps share perspectives about social justice, power, and inequality with different linguistic communities. Through translation, readers can access cultural and historical experiences that may differ from their own. It promotes dialogue between societies with different backgrounds and beliefs. Literary translation helps reduce cultural barriers and stereotypes. It also encourages empathy by presenting alternative worldviews. Therefore, translating Utopia supports meaningful intercultural communication.

This translation could be relevant for the author because it expands the reach of his message beyond English-speaking audiences. The themes explored in Utopia are global and resonate with readers from many cultures. Translating the book allows the author's ideas to have a broader social impact. It also increases recognition of his work in Spanish-speaking countries. Translation helps preserve the author's intentions while adapting them to a new audience. This process strengthens the relevance of the book internationally. As a result, the author benefits from greater visibility and influence.

This translation is important for me as a student of translation at Universidad Latina de Panama because it allows me to work with a complex literary text. Translating Utopia helps me apply translation theories in a real context. The book includes social, political, and cultural concepts that require careful interpretation. This challenges my linguistic and analytical skills. It also helps me develop cultural awareness and critical thinking. Working on this project prepares me for professional translation tasks. Additionally, it strengthens my academic formation as a future translator.

Spanish-speaking readers will benefit from the translation of Utopia because they will gain access to its ideas and themes. Students and researchers interested in social issues will find the book valuable. Educators can use it as a resource for discussions about equality and power. Translation students can learn from its narrative complexity. The general public will also benefit by understanding alternative perspectives on society. The book can encourage reflection and debate. Overall, the translation increases accessibility to important content.

Translation is closely related to research in Applied Linguistics because it focuses on how language is used in real contexts. Translating Utopia requires analyzing meaning, discourse, and cultural references. Applied Linguistics studies how language reflects society, which is essential in literary translation. This project contributes to research on equivalence and interpretation. It also examines how meaning changes across languages. Through this translation, theory and practice are connected. Therefore, translation plays an important role in Applied Linguistics research.

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective:

To translate pages 102 to 152 of the book “UTOPIA” by B.R. HERRON from English into Spanish.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives:

1. To apply seven distinct translation techniques from the source language into the target language (Spanish), providing two examples and a brief analysis for each technique.
2. To conduct a pre-translation text analysis to identify register, genre, tone, and audience of the source pages.
3. To create a bilingual glossary of key terms, idioms, and proper names found on the pages, with justified translation choices.
4. To demonstrate correct use of writing mechanics in the translated text, including punctuation, capitalization, cohesion, and overall unity.
5. To analyze and compare the linguistic structure of both languages, addressing syntax, semantics, and pragmatics to ensure accurate translation choices in a two column (mirror-like) structure.
6. Use parallel-text research (corpora, dictionaries, reference translations) to support difficult lexical or syntactic choices; document sources consulted.
7. To interpret and convey cultural and sociological nuances from the source text to produce a fluent translation that respects and reflects the target-language culture.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Translation techniques implemented:

As a bridge that connects the world; translation is important because it allows the communication and the cultural interchange between the members of a society. Translation is also important because it helps us in our daily life, translation is present almost everywhere, in the manual of our cellphones, computers, etc. It is present on the TV shows we like, without translation we wouldn't have the knowledge we have today, and we wouldn't live as comfortable as we live.

The role of a translator is to transform the message from the source text to a target text as accurate as possible, but in order to do that, the translator needs to be aware of the translation techniques. Translation techniques are the mechanism used to get the best possible result in the target language, there are different types of translation techniques which will need to be implemented by the translator according to the context of the text to be translated.

1. Translation Technique: Equivalence

Definition: Equivalence is a translation technique that allows the same situation to be expressed using different stylistic and structural means in the target language” (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958).

Example #1:

SL: They went out on the town to celebrate. (**Pag 26**)

TL: Salieron a celebrar por la ciudad (**Pag 26**)

Example #2:

SL: I have impregnated a young lady. (**Pag 69**)

TL: He dejado embarazada a una joven. (**Pag 69**)

Analysis

The two examples are different, but both clearly show the use of the equivalence technique in different contexts. In the first case, the expression “They went out on the town” is not translated literally because it is an idiomatic expression. Instead, it is translated as “salieron a celebrar por la ciudad”, which conveys the same idea of going out to have fun in a natural way in Spanish.

In the second case, the sentence “I have impregnated a young lady” could be translated literally as “*he impregnado a una joven*,” but this form is not commonly used in Spanish. Instead, it is translated as “he dejado embarazada a una joven,” which is more natural and appropriate in the target language.

2. Translation Technique: Modulation

Definition: This technique consists of changing the point of view, focus, or category of thought in the source text without altering the meaning of the message. (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958)

Example #1 (p. 47)

SL: It is very hard to forget the past.

TL: No es nada fácil olvidar el pasado.

Example #2 (p. 82)

SL: I will tell you the truth.

TL: No te lo voy a negar.

Analysis:

Both examples are clear cases of the modulation technique because the translator changes the point of view and the way the message is expressed without altering its meaning. In both translations, the structure shifts from a positive expression in English to a negative expression in Spanish, creating a more natural and fluent sentence for the target language.

In Example #1, the source text says “*It is very hard to forget the past,*” which expresses the idea in a direct and positive way. However, the target text changes the perspective to “*No es nada fácil olvidar el pasado,*” a negative construction that literally means “It is not easy at all to forget the past.” Even though the grammatical structure and focus are different, both sentences communicate the same idea: forgetting the past is difficult. The translator modifies the point of view to sound more natural in Spanish, which is characteristic of modulation.

In Example #2, the sentence “*I will tell you the truth*” is translated as “*No te lo voy a negar.*” Instead of directly expressing honesty in a positive form, the Spanish version communicates the same intention through negation, meaning “I am not

going to deny it to you.” Although the wording changes completely, both expressions imply sincerity and acceptance of the truth. The translator changes the focus of the message while preserving its meaning and communicative effect.

In both examples, the translations do not follow the exact structure of the source text. Instead, the translator changes the perspective and form of expression in order to create a more natural and idiomatic version in the target language. This change in viewpoint without modifying the meaning is what makes these examples instances of modulation.

3. Translation Technique: Transposition

Definition: This technique involves changing the grammatical category without changing the meaning. (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958)

Example #1 (p. 63)

SL: After he arrived, everything changed.

TL: Después de su llegada, todo cambió.

Example #2 (p. 105)

SL: He decided quickly.

TL: Tomó la decisión rápidamente.

Analysis

Both examples are clear cases of the transposition technique because the translator changes the grammatical category of certain elements while preserving the original meaning of the message. The translations do not follow the exact

grammatical structure of the source text; instead, they adapt it to forms that sound more natural in Spanish.

In Example #1, the source text uses the verbal structure *“After he arrived,”* where the action is expressed through the verb *“arrived.”* In the target text, this idea is transformed into the noun phrase *“después de su llegada,”* where the verb becomes the noun *“llegada.”* Although the grammatical category changes from a verb to a noun, the meaning remains the same because both sentences express that everything changed after his arrival. This shift from a verbal form to a nominal form is a characteristic example of transposition.

In Example #2, the source text says *“He decided quickly,”* using the verb *“decided”* to express the action. In the Spanish translation, the idea is restructured as *“Tomó la decisión rápidamente,”* where the action is expressed through the noun *“decisión”* combined with the verb *“tomó.”* Instead of translating it literally as *“Él decidió rápidamente,”* the translator changes the grammatical structure to a noun-based expression that sounds more natural in the target language. Even though the form changes, the meaning and communicative intention are preserved.

In both examples, the translator modifies the grammatical categories used in the source text without changing the message itself. These grammatical shifts, such as changing verbs into nouns, demonstrate the use of transposition because the meaning is maintained while the structure is altered to fit the conventions of the target language more naturally.

4. Translation Technique: Adaptation

Adaptation is a translation technique in which a cultural element from the source text is replaced with another element that is more familiar or relevant to the target culture. This technique is used when a literal translation would not make sense or would not produce the same effect on the target reader. (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958; Grassilli, 2015)

Example #1 (p. 75)

SL: They debated the ideal society over wine and bread.

TL: Conversaban sobre la sociedad ideal mientras compartían comida y bebida

Example #2 (p. 98)

SL: The citizens followed strict laws like those in ancient England

TL: “Los ciudadanos seguían leyes estrictas similares a las de la antigua Europa.

Analysis

In Example #1, the specific cultural items “*wine and bread*” are replaced with the more general expression “*comida y bebida*”, which makes the meaning accessible to Spanish readers without requiring knowledge of European eating traditions. In Example #2, the reference to “*ancient England*” is broadened to “*la antigua Europa*”, allowing the idea to remain understandable for readers who may not be familiar with English historical context. In both cases, the translator does not preserve the exact cultural elements, but instead substitutes them with more neutral or familiar expressions. This ensures that the message and its effect are maintained while adapting the content to the target culture, which is the essence of the adaptation technique.

5. Translation Technique: Borrowing

Definition: Borrowing is a translation technique in which a word or expression is taken directly from the source language and used in the target language without being translated. (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958)

Example #1 (p. 131)

SL: The ambulance arrived in five minutes.

TL: La ambulance llegó en cinco minutos.”

Example #2 (p. 77)

SL: Call the police immediately

TL: Llama a la police inmediatamente.

Analysis

Both examples illustrate the borrowing technique because English words are directly inserted into the Spanish translation without being fully translated. In Example #1, the word “*ambulance*” is kept in English instead of being translated as “*ambulancia*.” In Example #2, the word “*police*” is preserved in English instead of using the Spanish equivalent “*policía*.”

In both cases, the translator maintains key English terms within Spanish sentences, especially in an emergency context where clarity, urgency, and direct reference to institutions or objects are important. This direct insertion of source language vocabulary into the target language is what defines the borrowing technique

6. Translation Technique: Calque

Definition: Calque is a translation technique in which an expression is translated literally from the source language while preserving its original structure and word order. (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958)

Example #1 (p. 115)

SL: I have some important people I want you all to meet.

TL: Tengo algunas personas importantes que quiero que todos ustedes conozcan.

Example #2 (p. 116)

SL: My guests are inside waiting to meet you all.

TL: Mis invitados están adentro esperando para conocerlos a todos.

Analysis

This example also illustrates calque because the translation mirrors the structure of the English sentence very closely. The sentence keeps the same logical order: possession (*my guests / mis invitados*), location (*are inside / están adentro*), and action (*waiting to meet / esperando para conocer*). Each part of the sentence is translated directly, maintaining the same grammatical progression. Although Spanish naturally allows slight variations, the translator chooses to preserve the original structure, which is the key characteristic of calque

7. Translation Technique: Literal Translation

Definition: Literal translation is a technique in which the source text is translated word for word into the target language while respecting the grammatical rules of the target language. (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958)

Example #1 (p. 142)

SL: The doors opened very slowly.



TL: Las puertas se abrieron muy lentamente.

Example #2 (p. 55)

SL: The guard sat outside lab.



TL: El guardia se sentó fuera laboratorio

Analysis:

Both examples are cases of literal translation because the sentences are translated word by word from English into Spanish, keeping the same structure as much as possible. Each English word is directly matched with its Spanish equivalent, without changing the order or adding interpretation. Although Spanish may require slight grammatical adjustments, the translation remains essentially direct and word-for-word, which is the main characteristic of literal translation.

Second Chapter

2.1 Translated Document

Source Language	Target Language
Page 102	Página 102
Father Lark spoke to him in a calm voice. “It means the Earth will no longer exist in about sixty years, and we require your help. You have become the most powerful spiritual leader on Earth. The Custodians have been with you every step of the way over the decades, whether you realized it or not. We allowed you to live with some of our brothers in the holy lands. So they could teach you The Way. We even made donations to your first church with its seven members. So you could keep the doors open.”	El Padre Lark le habló con voz tranquila. —Significa que la Tierra dejará de existir en unos sesenta años, y requerimos de tu ayuda. Te has convertido en el líder espiritual más poderoso de la Tierra. Los Custodios han estado contigo en cada paso del camino a lo largo de las décadas, te hayas dado cuenta o no. Te permitimos vivir con algunos de nuestros hermanos en las tierras santas para que pudieran enseñarte El Camino. Incluso hicimos donaciones a tu primera iglesia de siete miembros para que pudieras mantener las puertas abiertas.
He took off his reading glasses and looked directly into Jason’s eyes. “We made sure the Beale Group chose you as the head of NWF. Now, we need you to help the ancestors of Jesus get home before it is too late.”	Se quitó las gafas de lectura y miró directamente a los ojos de Jason. — Nos aseguramos de que el Grupo Beale te eligiera como jefe de la NWF. Ahora, necesitamos que ayudes a los antepasados de Jesús a volver a casa antes de que sea demasiado tarde.
Jason sat back and cleared his throat with a dazed look. “Father Lark, I need time to think and meditate on all I have heard and learned here today. Can I talk with you about this more tomorrow?”	Jason se recostó y se aclaró la garganta con una mirada aturdida. —Padre Lark, necesito tiempo para pensar y meditar en todo lo que he escuchado y aprendido aquí hoy. ¿Puedo hablar más con usted sobre esto mañana?
“I expected you to say that, the chapel door is open; we will talk in the morning.” Jason went to the little chapel behind the main house. As he walked to the front of the chapel, it dawned on him that Jesus helped build this place. He took a seat in the front row pew. He’d	—Esperaba que dijeras eso; la puerta de la capilla está abierta. Hablaremos por la mañana. Jason fue a la pequeña capilla detrás de la casa principal. Mientras caminaba hacia el frente de la capilla, comprendió que Jesús había ayudado a construir este lugar. Se sentó en el banco de la primera fila. Siempre había creído que

always believed Jesus was a great prophet who taught peace and love. But he also believed Jesus was a man and not a God, an exceptional teacher and communicator, and in all likelihood, had married. He also believed Jesus was a wealthy merchant who traveled the world instead of a poor carpenter, as many believed. But... this information had blown his mind and theories out of the water. Jason bent over, put his head in his hands, and started rocking and chanting. He needed his mind to settle down. The chanting lasted about an hour. Once he reached a state where his mind became quiet, he sat up. Keeping his eyes closed, he asked God to come into his presence. He came, and Jason spent the night talking with the Father. Page 103 The following day at breakfast, Jason walked into the dining area refreshed. Everyone was already seated and eating. They all stopped and looked at him. "I have spent time with God," he said as he walked over, sat down, poured himself a cup of tea, and looked at everyone. "I have decided that your family and any servants you wish can return to Africa with me." He paused to add sugar to his cup. "I have a private island off the coast of Dakar. And I have friends who may	Jesús fue un gran profeta que enseñó paz y amor. Pero también creía que Jesús era un hombre y no un Dios, un maestro y comunicador excepcional que, con toda probabilidad, se había casado. También creía que Jesús era un mercader adinerado que viajaba por el mundo en lugar de un carpintero pobre, como muchos creían. Pero... esta información le había volado la cabeza y echado por tierra sus teorías. Jason se inclinó, puso la cabeza entre las manos y empezó a balancearse y a salmodiar. Necesitaba que su mente se calmara. El cántico duró aproximadamente una hora. Una vez que alcanzó un estado en el que su mente se quedó en silencio, se incorporó. Manteniendo los ojos cerrados, le pidió a Dios que se hiciera presente. Él vino, y Jason pasó la noche hablando con el Padre. Página 103 Al día siguiente, en el desayuno, Jason entró en el comedor sintiéndose renovado. Todos estaban ya sentados y comiendo. Todos se detuvieron y lo miraron. —He pasado tiempo con Dios —dijo mientras se acercaba, se sentaba, se servía una taza de té y miraba a todos. —He decidido que su familia y cualquier sirviente que deseen pueden regresar a África conmigo. Hizo una pausa para añadir azúcar a su taza. —Tengo una isla privada frente a la costa de Dakar. Y tengo amigos que
--	--

know how to use the ship. Maybe they can devise a plan to get your family home.”

Only John reacted with a big smile to what he said. That’s because Marie and her children could read his emotions before he said a word. Father Lark already knew what his answer would be over a year ago.

Page 104

Chapter 14

JD spent the last ten weeks in basic training, and it was finally over. Now, it was time to fly.

He earned his mosquito wings and was now

Airman First Class Williams. Jace and Jacobie decided to join the officer’s corps. They outranked him, which was okay with him; he was on another mission.

JD’s first assignment was to fly the military’s air cars, or MACs, invented by Mussa and Herman, who had taught him everything about air cars.

During training exercises, his knowledge and skills with the car earned him high praise from his superiors. After one month in the field, his commanding officer called him over.

“Airman Williams, I have recommended you be given command of a MAC. You know these cars better than anybody here. We could use your skills to help teach others. You are to report to

podrían saber cómo usar la nave. Quizás ellos puedan idear un plan para llevar a su familia a casa.

Solo John reaccionó con una gran sonrisa a lo que dijo. Eso fue porque Marie y sus hijos podían leer sus emociones antes de que pronunciara una sola palabra. El Padre Lark ya sabía cuál sería su respuesta desde hacía más de un año.

Pagina 104

Capítulo 14

JD pasó las últimas diez semanas en el entrenamiento básico, y finalmente había terminado. Ahora, era el momento de volar.

Ganó sus alas de mosquito y ahora era el Aviador de Primera Clase Williams. Jace y Jacobie decidieron unirse al cuerpo de oficiales. Ellos tenían un rango superior al suyo, lo cual le parecía bien; él estaba en otra misión.

La primera tarea de JD fue pilotar los coches aéreos militares, o MACs, inventados por Mussa y Herman, quienes le habían enseñado todo sobre estos vehículos.

Durante los ejercicios de entrenamiento, sus conocimientos y habilidades con el coche le valieron grandes elogios de sus superiores. Tras un mes en el campo, su oficial al mando lo llamó.

—Aviador Williams, he recomendado que se le asigne el mando de un MAC. Usted conoce estos vehículos mejor que nadie aquí. Podríamos usar sus habilidades para ayudar a enseñar a otros. Debe presentarse en la oficina

General Johnson's office for further instructions." JD was pleased but not surprised. It was part of his plan. "Thank you, Lieutenant Sarr." He snapped a salute and did an about-face. He headed toward the main administration building. As he walked, he messaged his dad, <i>Hey pops, I'm on my way to meet with General Johnson about an early promotion. Wish me luck.</i> JD walked into the antechamber of the generals and snapped a salute to the captain sitting behind the desk. "I am here to see the general, sir." The captain looked at him with a bland expression and asked, "Which general, private? There are two of them." "Sorry, sir, I need to speak with General Johnson." "Private Williams," he said, reading his name tag. "What is the nature of this visit?" "Lieutenant Sarr told me to report, sir." Page 105 The captain checked the computerized appointment schedule. "Yes, private, I see your name, please have a seat. I will let him know you are here." A few minutes later, the receptionist's WPC buzzed. "Private, you may enter the door behind me and take the first door on the right." JD stood and started in the direction the captain indicated. "Thank you, sir."	del General Johnson para recibir más instrucciones. JD estaba complacido pero no sorprendido. Era parte de su plan. —Gracias, Teniente Sarr. —Hizo un saludo militar enérgico y dio media vuelta. Se dirigió hacia el edificio administrativo principal. Mientras caminaba, le envió un mensaje a su padre: <i>Hola papá, voy de camino a reunirme con el General Johnson para un ascenso anticipado. Deséame suerte.</i> JD entró en la antecámara de los generales y saludó al capitán que estaba sentado tras el escritorio. —Vengo a ver al general, señor. —El capitán lo miró con expresión inexpresiva y preguntó—: ¿A qué general, soldado? Hay dos. —Lo siento, señor, necesito hablar con el General Johnson. —Soldado Williams —dijo leyendo su placa de identificación—. ¿Cuál es el motivo de esta visita? —El Teniente Sarr me dijo que me presentara, señor. Página 105 El capitán consultó la agenda electrónica de citas. —Sí, soldado, veo su nombre, por favor tome asiento. Le avisaré que está aquí. —Unos minutos después, el WPC del recepcionista zumbó—. Soldado, puede entrar por la puerta que está detrás de mí y tomar la primera puerta a la derecha. JD se levantó y se dirigió en la dirección que el capitán le indicó. —Gracias, señor.
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He knocked on the door and waited for permission to enter. “Come in,” a deep male voice responded. JD entered the office, walked to the front of the desk, and snapped a salute. Avery, with an amused look on his face, returned the salute. He was amazed at how much the boy looked like his father. “Private, before you sit, I want you to acknowledge General Ore.” Surprised, JD looked behind him. A woman sat on a loveseat by the window, almost hidden by a standing lamp. She looked to be about the same age as the general. Her gray hair was pulled up into a tall bun. He wondered briefly how she got it to stay up like that. He quickly turned his body to face her and snapped a salute. “Sorry, Ma’am, I did not see you sitting there when I entered.” Roxy returned the salute. “That’s okay, son. I am hiding out here today.” “Take a seat, private.” Avery pointed. “I have heard great reports about you and your skills and knowledge with the MAC. Can I ask you a question?” He didn’t wait for a response. “Why haven’t you joined the officer’s corps like your two friends?” I see in your records that you are more than qualified.” JD was nonplused and stated calmly. “I will join at some point, sir, but right now, I want to learn to be an enlisted man first. I want to understand their duties and responsibilities.” He turned	Llamó a la puerta y esperó permiso para entrar. —Adelante —respondió una profunda voz masculina. JD entró en la oficina, caminó hasta el frente del escritorio y saludó militarmente. Avery, con una expresión divertida en el rostro, le devolvió el saludo. Estaba sorprendido de lo mucho que el joven se parecía a su padre. —Soldado, antes de que se siente, quiero que salude a la General Ore. Sorprendido, JD miró detrás de él. Una mujer estaba sentada en un sofá junto a la ventana, casi oculta por una lámpara de pie. Parecía tener más o menos la misma edad que el general. Su cabello canoso estaba recogido en un moño alto. Se preguntó brevemente cómo lograba que se mantuviera así. Rápidamente giró su cuerpo hacia ella y la saludó. —Lo siento, señora, no la vi sentada allí cuando entré. Roxy le devolvió el saludo. —Está bien, hijo. Hoy estoy escondiéndome aquí. —Tome asiento, soldado —indicó Avery—. He recibido excelentes informes sobre usted y sus habilidades y conocimientos con el MAC. ¿Puedo hacerle una pregunta? —No esperó respuesta—. ¿Por qué no se ha unido al cuerpo de oficiales como sus dos amigos? Veo en su expediente que está más que calificado. JD se mostró imperturbable y respondió con calma: —Me uniré en algún momento, señor, pero por ahora quiero aprender primero a ser un soldado raso. Quiero entender sus deberes y responsabilidades. —Se volvió
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back toward the loveseat. "Just like you, General Ore. My dad and mom told me all about you two."

They both looked at him, a bit surprised. "Really now, and what did they tell you?" Avery asked, amused for the second time.

JD had always been taught not to lie, and he didn't even stop to think about it. "Well, sir, my dad doesn't like you very much. But I get the impression he respects you."

He turned and looked at the other officer. "He admires you, General Ore. My father says you were a top NCO and should have been the Army's first female Combat Command Sergeant Major. But you refused to play games with the 'good old boys.'

JD glanced at the picture on the desk. "Sir, how do you know my squadmate?" Avery almost giggled, then said. "Keyerra is my daughter."

"And she is my goddaughter," Roxy said with a broad smile.

For the second time, JD was caught off guard. "Wow! Sir, she never told us about her family."

Avery chuckled this time. "She made it very clear she wouldn't broadcast that fact to anybody and asked us to do the same. Said she wanted to earn her way on her own merit. But Keyerra talks a lot about you and your two friends. She said you guys weren't full of yourselves because your parents were rich and powerful. That's high praise coming from her.

hacia el sofá—. Igual que usted, General Ore. Mi papá y mi mamá me han contado todo sobre ustedes dos.

Ambos lo miraron, algo sorprendidos. —¿Ah, sí? ¿Y qué te dijeron? —preguntó Avery, divertido por segunda vez.

A JD siempre le enseñaron a no mentir, y ni siquiera lo pensó. —Bueno, señor, a mi papá no le agrada mucho usted, pero tengo la impresión de que lo respeta.

—Se giró hacia la otra oficial—. A usted la admira, General Ore. Mi padre dice que usted fue una suboficial de primer nivel y que debió haber sido la primera mujer Sargento Mayor de Comando de Combate del Ejército, pero se negó a seguirles el juego a los "de siempre".

JD echó un vistazo a la foto en el escritorio. —Señor, ¿cómo conoce a mi compañera de escuadrón?

Avery casi se rió y luego dijo: —Keyerra es mi hija.

—Y es mi ahijada —añadió Roxy con una gran sonrisa.

Por segunda vez, JD se quedó sorprendido. —¡Vaya! Señor, ella nunca nos habló de su familia.

Avery soltó una risa. —Ella dejó muy claro que no quería contarle eso a nadie y nos pidió que hiciéramos lo mismo. Dijo que quería ganarse su lugar por sus propios méritos. Pero Keyerra habla mucho de ti y de tus dos amigos. Dice que ustedes no son engreídos a pesar de que sus padres son ricos y poderosos. Eso es un gran elogio viniendo de ella.

Thank you for helping her study when she didn't have a WPC." JD blushed, licked his lips, and smiled a lopsided smile. "Sir, she is really intelligent, and her practical knowledge helped us more than we helped her." Avery noticed the glint in the young man's eyes when he talked about Keyerra. "Are you dating my daughter?" he asked abruptly.	Gracias por ayudarla a estudiar cuando no tenía un WPC. JD se sonrojó, se lamió los labios y sonrió de lado. —Señor, ella es muy inteligente, y su conocimiento práctico nos ayudó más a nosotros de lo que nosotros la ayudamos a ella. Avery notó el brillo en los ojos del joven cuando hablaba de Keyerra. —¿Estás saliendo con mi hija? —preguntó de repente.
Page 107 JD was taken aback by the direct question. He would love to date her but she was seeing someone else. Instead, he said out loud, "No, sir. We are just friends." "Well, keep it that way." Avery leaned forward and gave JD... the look. General Ore laughed out loud. "Stop it, Avery, before you scare the boy. Remember why he's here." The look didn't change until he glanced at his WPC monitor and JD's file. "Private, we want you to join a battalion of MACs headed to Mexico. We have reports of enemy activity in the area. You will be given command of one of the new MACs fresh from the factory." He brought up a 4D map that floated between them. "Your battalion will patrol this area between Mexico and Arizona," he pointed. "I know the weapons on the newest cars haven't been activated yet, but we need all eyes on this.	Páginas 107 JD se quedó sorprendido por la pregunta directa. Le encantaría salir con ella, pero ella estaba viendo a alguien más. En su lugar, dijo en voz alta: —No, señor. Solo somos amigos. —Bueno, que siga así. —Avery se inclinó hacia adelante y le lanzó a JD... "la mirada" La General Ore soltó una carcajada. —Basta, Avery, antes de que asustes al chico. Recuerda por qué está aquí. La expresión no cambió hasta que miró su monitor WPC y el expediente de JD. —Soldado, queremos que se una a un batallón de MACs que se dirige a México. Tenemos informes de actividad enemiga en la zona. Se le dará el mando de uno de los nuevos MAC recién salidos de fábrica. Desplegó un mapa 4D que flotaba entre ellos. —Su batallón patrullará esta zona entre México y Arizona señaló Sé que las armas de los vehículos más nuevos no han sido activadas, pero necesitamos todos los ojos puestos en esto.

If you see anything, report it to our forces on the ground and your battalion commander. Do not engage, do you understand?" "Yes sir, I understand." Avery gave him another long look and continued. "Lieutenant Jacobie Franklin will be in command of your squad. Your other squadron mates will be Lieutenant Jace McDaniel, and Keyerra will also be given command of a new MAC. You and she have been given a promotion to the rank of sergeant." "Thank you sir, for the opportunity." JD stood and snapped a salute, turned, and repeated the process to General Ore. He did an about-face and left the office, his chest filled with pride. He had only three more promotions to go. His goal was to get four promotions in less than two years. Avery and Roxy looked at each other after JD left the room. "That boy has a thing for your daughter. But I've gotten the impression Keyerra has someone else in her heart."	Si v algo, repórtelo a nuestras fuerzas en tierra y a su comandante de batallón. No entable combate, ¿entendido? —Sí, señor, entendido. Avery le lanzó otra larga mirada y continuó. —El teniente Jacobie Franklin estará al mando de su escuadrón. Sus otros compañeros serán el teniente Jace McDaniel, y a Keyerra también se le asignará el mando de un nuevo MAC. A usted y a ella se les ha otorgado un ascenso al rango de sargento. —Gracias, señor, por la oportunidad. — JD se puso de pie y saludó militarmente, se giró y repitió el proceso con la General Ore. Dio media vuelta y salió de la oficina, con el pecho lleno de orgullo. Solo le faltaban tres ascensos más. Su objetivo era conseguir cuatro ascensos en menos de dos años. Avery y Roxy se miraron después de que JD saliera de la habitación. —Ese chico siente algo por tu hija. Pero tengo la impresión de que Keyerra tiene a alguien más en su corazón.
Page 108 Avery shook his head. "That's too bad, I like the boy. He has juice." "Hey, fly guy!" Jace called after him. "Congratulations!" JD had just walked out of the admin building. He snapped a salute as she approached. "Dang, girl, how did you know?" She returned the salute. "We are the wire-head generation, remember? All real-time information is instantly uploaded to the neuro-net,	Páginas 108 Avery negó con la cabeza. —Es una lástima, me agrada el chico. Tiene potencial. —¡Eh, piloto! —le gritó Jace—. ¡Felicidades! —JD acababa de salir del edificio administrativo. Él la saludó militarmente mientras ella se acercaba. —Rayos, chica, ¿cómo lo supiste? Ella le devolvió el saludo. —Somos la generación conectada, ¿recuerdas? Toda la información en tiempo real se sube instantáneamente a la neurorred,

which our brains are jacked into. We can see the info seconds after it is downloaded. You just have to know where to look. That's something you taught me and Jacobie our freshman term." JD smiled at her. "Have you met the new base commanders yet?" "No, but you just came from their offices. Do they have four heads or something?" "Or something," he said, shaking his head. "They are Keyerra's parents." "What!" Jace looked surprised. "She has never said a word." "I know, but I understand. If my face weren't plastered on vids and billboards everywhere in this uniform, I wouldn't have told anybody who my parents were either. She wants to be known _for her work and not who her dad is. I can relate." Jace also saw the glint in his eyes when he talked about her, but this was not the time or place to comment on it. "So, we leave in a week. We finally get to see the world outside the New Union, and I'm so excited!" she said instead. One week later, the New Union battalion of MACs landed in Juarez, Mexico. Like all NU nations, it was a very prosperous city and beautiful in a different way. The temperature-controlled desert had been annexed into the city, and no space was left unused. Sky escalators and walkovers were everywhere, and cars were not necessary to get around town.	a la que nuestros cerebros están conectados. Podemos ver la información segundos después de que se descarga. Solo hay que saber dónde buscar. Eso es algo que nos enseñaste a mí y a Jacobie en nuestro primer trimestre. JD le sonrió. —¿Ya conociste a los nuevos comandantes de la base? —No, pero tú acabas de salir de sus oficinas. ¿Tienen cuatro cabezas o algo así? —O algo así —dijo él, negando con la cabeza—. Son los padres de Keyerra. —¡¿Qué?! —Jace se sorprendió—. Ella nunca dijo nada. —Lo sé, pero lo entiendo. Si mi cara no estuviera en todos los videos y carteles con este uniforme, tampoco le diría a nadie quiénes son mis padres. Ella quiere ser reconocida por su trabajo y no por quién es su padre. Me identifico con eso. Jace también notó el brillo en sus ojos cuando hablaba de ella, pero no era el momento ni el lugar para decir algo. — Así que nos vamos en una semana. ¡Por fin veremos el mundo fuera de la Nueva Unión, y estoy muy emocionada! Una semana después, el batallón de MACs de la Nueva Unión aterrizó en Juárez, México. Como todas las naciones de la NU, era una ciudad muy próspera y hermosa a su manera. El desierto con temperatura controlada había sido integrado a la ciudad y no se desaprovechaba ningún espacio. Había escaleras mecánicas aéreas y pasarelas por todas partes, y no era necesario usar autos para desplazarse.
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It was also the only place in the NU where gambling was legal. The expensive resorts were	También era el único lugar de la NU donde el juego era legal. Los resorts de lujo siempre
Page 109	Pagina109
always booked. Malls with all the name brands dominated downtown. Juarez became the place to go on vacation or a quick shopping getaway.	estaban llenos. Los centros comerciales con todas las marcas dominaban el centro. Juárez se convirtió en el destino ideal para vacacionar o hacer compras rápidas.
Back at the headquarters airfield, Jacobie held up a hand. “Ok, squad four! Fall in on me!” Jacobie bellowed as he called his squad together. He touched a button on his wrist control unit, and a map of the border appeared.	De regreso en la base, Jacobie levantó la mano. —¡Bien, escuadrón cuatro! ¡Reúnanse conmigo! —gritó mientras llamaba a su equipo. Tocó un botón en su muñeca y apareció un mapa de la frontera.
“Lieutenant McDaniel, you and your gunner will fly in tandem with Sergeant Williams and her gunner. Sergeant Johnson and I will fly together with our gunners. Our mission is to patrol this sixty-mile stretch of the border.	—Teniente McDaniel, usted y su artillero volarán en tándem con la sargento Williams y su artillero. El sargento Johnson y yo volaremos juntos. Nuestra misión es patrullar este tramo de sesenta millas de la frontera.
“Lieutenant,” he said, looking at Jace. “You and Sergeant Williams go to the north. Sergeant Johnson and I will go south. We will meet in the middle here,” he pointed. “And stop for lunch. Stay under the American radar; fly no higher than two kilometers.”	—Teniente —dijo mirando a Jace—, usted y la sargento Williams irán al norte. El sargento Johnson y yo iremos al sur. Nos encontraremos en este punto —señaló— y pararemos a almorzar. Manténganse fuera del radar estadounidense; no vuelen a más de dos kilómetros de altura.
“Remember, our goal is to spot any enemy activity and call it in.” He looked at each one of them. “The cars we have been assigned are fresh from the factory, and the weapons are not hot. I repeat, our weapons are not hot.” “Then what are we supposed to do? Drop rocks on them if we see anything?” Jace asked.	—Recuerden, nuestro objetivo es detectar cualquier actividad enemiga y reportarla. —Miró a cada uno—. Los vehículos que nos asignaron son nuevos y las armas no están activadas. Repito, no están activadas. —¿Entonces qué se supone que hagamos? ¿Lanzarles piedras si vemos algo? —preguntó Jace.

“Command has multiple rocket launch systems or MRLS. They can reach their target from their position up to thirty miles away. We will call them first if we see anything. I need everyone to stay in constant communication while we’re in the air. Are there any more questions?” No one said a word. “Ok, everybody, load up, and let’s fly guys!”

After lunch, JD spotted a group of four trucks with mounted rocket launchers on top of each truck’s cab. He messaged Jacobie and the rest of the crew. *“We have spotted unmarked military vehicles just outside of Nogales, AZ, approaching the point of entry to Mexico.”*

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A few minutes later, Jacobie reported back to the crew. “MRLS command says they can’t fire. The area is too congested with non-military personnel.

They want us to stay with them until they reach open space. Johnson and I will turn around and get ahead of them.”

Ten minutes later, JD reported. “The trucks have crossed the border and have turned down a side road. They are headed toward a collection of buildings congested together about twenty-five clicks away. They appear to be factories of some type.” He gave Jacobie the coordinates.

Jacobie responded a minute later with urgency. “Those are UN munition depots guys! We manufacture the AK-6.5 there. These guns are twice as deadly as any handheld automatic

—El mando cuenta con sistemas de lanzamiento múltiple de cohetes, MRLS. Pueden alcanzar objetivos a más de treinta millas. Los llamaremos primero si vemos algo. Necesito comunicación constante. ¿Alguna pregunta? —Nadie habló—. Bien, ¡a sus puestos, vamos a volar!

Después del almuerzo, JD divisó un grupo de cuatro camiones con lanzacohetes montados sobre la cabina de cada uno. Envío un mensaje a Jacobie y al resto del equipo: Hemos detectado vehículos militares sin identificación justo a las afueras de Nogales, Arizona, acercándose al punto de entrada hacia México.

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Unos minutos después, Jacobie informó al equipo: —El mando de MRLS dice que no pueden disparar. El área está demasiado congestionada con personal no militar.

Quieren que nos mantengamos con ellos hasta que lleguen a un espacio abierto. Johnson y yo daremos la vuelta y nos adelantaremos.”

Diez minutos después, JD informó: — Los camiones han cruzado la frontera y han tomado una carretera secundaria. Se dirigen hacia un conjunto de edificios muy juntos a unos veinticinco kilómetros de distancia. Parecen ser fábricas de algún tipo. —Le dio a Jacobie las coordenadas.

Jacobie respondió un minuto después con urgencia: —¡Esos son depósitos de municiones de la NU, chicos! Allí fabricamos el AK-6.5. Estas armas son el doble de letales que cualquier arma

weapon developed. Now we know why they are here, to take control of the factories. We have to stop them!” Keyerra responded, “Call MRLS back so they can blow them up!” “That’s a negative, Sergeant. There are still too many civilians in the area.” “It looks like they are about fifteen minutes from the facilities, what about the SDS?” Jace responded. “They are in a New Union nation.” “The SDS has a twenty-mile kill radius, meaning everything in that radius will be destroyed, including us,” Jacobie responded. “I have an idea,” JD neuro-messaged Jacobie personally. <i>“I know how to activate the guns. It’s a simple process that will take only a few minutes. I could hook it up and give my gunner some target practice. I will send instructions on how to hook up the guns for the rest of the squad.”</i> JD remembered one day while fooling around in his Uncle Herman’s lab. His hologram climbed into the MAC while his uncle worked under the hood. Herman was adjusting the smaller laser	automática portátil desarrollada. Ahora sabemos por qué están aquí: para tomar el control de las fábricas. ¡Tenemos que detenerlos! Keyerra respondió: —¡Llamen de nuevo al MRLS para que los destruyan! —Negativo, sargento. Todavía hay demasiados civiles en la zona. —Parece que están a unos quince minutos de las instalaciones, ¿qué hay del SDS? —respondió Jace—. Están en una nación de la Nueva Unión. —El SDS tiene un radio de destrucción de veinte millas, lo que significa que todo dentro de ese radio será destruido, incluidos nosotros —respondió Jacobie. —Tengo una idea —JD envió un neuro-mensaje a Jacobie de forma privada—. Sé cómo activar las armas. Es un proceso sencillo que tomará solo unos minutos. Podría conectarlo y darle a mi artillero algo de práctica de tiro. Enviaré instrucciones sobre cómo conectar las armas para el resto del escuadrón. JD recordó un día en que estaba jugando en el laboratorio de su tío Herman. Su holograma se subió al MAC mientras su tío trabajaba bajo el capó. Herman estaba ajustando el arma láser más pequeña
Page 111 weapon he’d developed for the vehicle. JD’s hologram was in a more solid form to interact with objects. He grabbed the joystick for the weapon. “Stop, JD!” Herman called to him. He had never heard his uncle raise his voice, and he froze. Herman walked over to the passenger’s side. “Before you play with the gun, check to make	Paginas 111 que había desarrollado para el vehículo. El holograma de JD estaba en una forma más sólida para poder interactuar con los objetos. Agarró la palanca de control del arma. —¡Detente, JD! —le gritó Herman. Nunca había escuchado a su tío alzar la voz, y se quedó paralizado. Herman caminó hacia el lado del pasajero. — Antes de jugar con el arma, asegúrate

sure it is not connected. We don't want to blow up the lab, do we?" He'd patiently shown him how to connect and disconnect the cables for the weapon.

Jacobie thought on it for a moment and messaged him. *"Are you sure?"* JD instantly replied. *"Yes. Uncle Herman taught me how."*

Jacobie knew JD well; if he said he could do something, it would get done. "OK, go for it. I will inform base command." Jacobie also told the rest of the squad to follow JD's directives on activating their weapons. He gave Keyerra the new coordinates, so they were all in a position to help.

JD unstrapped and put the MAC on autopilot. He got on his hands and knees to connect the cables under the dashboard. When JD was finished, he nodded to his gunner, Corporal Berko.

"All right, flip that yellow switch."

The corporal did as he was told, and his side of the dashboard lit up. "It worked, Sergeant. Everything is green. I can activate the targeting system!"

"All right, Berko, just like in the simulator, line your target up in the crosshairs and fire when ready." Back in the control seat, JD zipped the MAC toward the trucks.

"Roger that, Sergeant Williams. Firing... Now!"

A blue flash hit the first truck in the convoy, causing it to explode in a big ball of flames. The other three trucks

de que no esté conectada. No queremos hacer volar el laboratorio, ¿verdad?—. Luego le mostró con paciencia cómo conectar y desconectar los cables del arma.

Jacobie lo pensó por un momento y le envió un mensaje: —¿Estás seguro? JD respondió al instante: —Sí, mi tío Herman me enseñó cómo hacerlo.

Jacobie conocía bien a JD; si decía que podía hacer algo, lo lograría. —Está bien, hazlo. Informaré al mando de la base.

Jacobie también le indicó al resto del escuadrón que siguieran las instrucciones de JD para activar sus armas. Le dio a Keyerra las nuevas coordenadas, para que todos estuvieran en posición de ayudar.

JD se desabrochó y puso el MAC en piloto automático. Se colocó sobre manos y rodillas para conectar los cables debajo del tablero. Cuando terminó, le hizo una señal con la cabeza a su artillero, el cabo Berko.

—Muy bien, activa ese interruptor amarillo.

El cabo hizo lo que se le indicó, y su lado del tablero se iluminó. —Funcionó, sargento. Todo está en verde. ¡Puedo activar el sistema de apuntado!

—Muy bien, Berko, igual que en el simulador: alinea tu objetivo en la mira y dispara cuando estés listo.

De vuelta en el asiento de control, JD lanzó el MAC a toda velocidad hacia los camiones.

—Recibido, sargento Williams. Disparando... ¡ahora!

Un destello azul impactó el primer camión del convoy, provocando que explotara en una gran bola de fuego.

stopped but responded quickly. They pointed their rocket launchers up at them and began to fire.	Los otros tres camiones se detuvieron, pero reaccionaron rápidamente. Apuntaron sus lanzacohetes hacia ellos y comenzaron a disparar.
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“Shit! They are shooting back.” Corporal Berko pressed the button to fire again, but nothing happened.	—¡Mierda! Están respondiendo al ataque. El cabo Berko presionó el botón para disparar nuevamente, pero no pasó nada.
JD quickly flew the MAC up into the clouds. “We will have to wait thirty seconds before the laser will recharge,” he told the corporal. He messaged Jacobie.	JD elevó rápidamente el MAC hacia las nubes. —Tendremos que esperar treinta segundos para que el láser se recargue —le dijo al cabo. Luego envió un mensaje a Jacobie.
<i>“I forgot. We only get one shot per thirty seconds. We need your help! We got the first truck, but they are shooting back. I am going to try to stay out of range until our weapon recharges.</i>	Olvidé mencionarlo. Solo tenemos un disparo cada treinta segundos. ¡Necesitamos tu ayuda! Destruimos el primer camión, pero están respondiendo al ataque. Voy a intentar mantenerme fuera de su alcance hasta que nuestra arma se recargue.
<i>“We got you!”</i> Jacobie messaged back. He gave the rest of the squad new orders. They would drop down from the clouds one at a time. First, Jace swooped down toward the next truck. Her gunner fired dead center and blew up the second truck. The other two trucks began to fire at them. She quickly flew out of range.	—¡Estamos contigo! —respondió Jacobie por mensaje. Le dio nuevas órdenes al resto del escuadrón. Descenderían desde las nubes uno a la vez. Primero, Jace se lanzó en picada hacia el siguiente camión. Su artillero disparó justo en el centro y destruyó el segundo camión. Los otros dos camiones comenzaron a dispararles. Ella rápidamente salió del alcance.
That was when Keyerra swooped down from the opposite direction, took out the third truck, and quickly got out of there. Finally, Jacobie flew down and destroyed the last truck. “Great job! Now that’s some fly guy shit! That’s what you call teamwork! Let’s get	Fue entonces cuando Keyerra descendió en picada desde la dirección opuesta, destruyó el tercer camión y salió rápidamente de allí. Finalmente, Jacobie descendió y destruyó el último camión. —¡Gran trabajo! ¡Eso sí que es volar como profesionales! ¡A eso se le llama

back to the base command,” Jacobie ordered. That night, the squad went out on the town to celebrate. Juarez was in party mode with all the UN troops in town. They had plenty of options of where to go and play when off-duty. But the entire fourth squad wanted to take the escalators to a club just off base. It was a military bar full of servicemen. The fourth squad jammed into a corner booth close to the back of the bar. While live freeze-lock Mariachi music was playing by guys in colorful big-ass hats. “Damn, guys, today was intense!” Jace said as she slammed another shot of tequila. She was enjoying the effects of the first grain alcoholic beverage. It was the first time any of them had drunk alcohol. Page 113 Corporal Berko and the two other gunners got up and went to the dance floor. They were doing the latest pop and freeze dance moves. It was the first live band they had ever heard, and they were enjoying themselves. Jacobie was about to make another toast when the Mission Commander walked up to their tables. “Are you the guys from the fourth squad of the MAC battalion?” “Yes sir,” they all answered in unison.	trabajo en equipo! Volvamos al mando de la base —ordenó Jacobie. Esa noche, el escuadrón salió a la ciudad a celebrar. Juárez estaba en modo fiesta con todas las tropas de la NU en la ciudad. Tenían muchas opciones de dónde ir y divertirse cuando estaban fuera de servicio. Pero todo el cuarto escuadrón quería tomar las escaleras mecánicas hacia un club justo fuera de la base. Era un bar militar lleno de soldados. El cuarto escuadrón se acomodó apretadamente en un reservado en la esquina, cerca del fondo del bar, mientras sonaba música mariachi en vivo estilo freeze-lock interpretada por hombres con sombreros grandes y coloridos. —¡Demonios, chicos, hoy estuvo intenso! —dijo Jace mientras se tomaba otro trago de tequila de un solo golpe. Estaba disfrutando los efectos de la primera bebida alcohólica de grano. Era la primera vez que cualquiera de ellos bebía alcohol. Paginas 113 El cabo Berko y los otros dos artilleros se levantaron y se dirigieron a la pista de baile. Estaban haciendo los últimos pasos de baile de pop y freeze. Era la primera vez que escuchaban una banda en vivo, y lo estaban disfrutando. Jacobie estaba a punto de hacer otro brindis cuando el comandante de la misión se acercó a sus mesas. —¿Son ustedes los del cuarto escuadrón del batallón de MACs? —Sí, señor —respondieron todos al unísono.
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“Well, you guys performed great today! I wanted to thank you personally. Which one of you is the famous JD Williams?”

“That would be me, sir,” JD said as he raised a lopsided hand and dropped it. “Your quick thinking saved a lot of lives today. You guys prevented the take-over of a very important facility. I shudder to think what may have happened if the Americans had gotten control of the factory.”

“On my authorization, your entire squad will be given field promotions up one grade. For your action today in combat, congratulations! I want this crew to train the rest of your battalion on activating the laser weapons.” The commander smiled broadly. “The rest of your drinks are on me tonight. Again, thank you all for your quick actions.” He left them speechless.

Finally, Jace said loudly, “Bartender, another round of tequila!!!” They fist-bumped with each other, laughing and enjoying the evening. JD thought to himself, *Staff Sergeant. Only two more ranks to go.* Once he made First Sergeant, he would join the officer’s corps and earn his pilot wings.

Wasted from the effects of the alcohol, they decided to go back to base. They caught an escalator going back in that direction. Berko said, pointing to an art parlor. “Let’s get body art to remember this mission. guys!”

—Bueno, ¡hicieron un gran trabajo hoy! Quería agradecerles personalmente. ¿Cuál de ustedes es el famoso JD Williams?

—Ese soy yo, señor —dijo JD mientras levantaba la mano de forma un poco torpe y la bajaba.

—Tu rapidez para pensar salvó muchas vidas hoy.

Ustedes evitaron la toma de una instalación muy importante. Me estremece pensar lo que habría pasado si los estadounidenses hubieran tomado el control de la fábrica.

—Bajo mi autorización, todo su escuadrón recibirá ascensos de campaña de un grado. Por su acción hoy en combate, ¡felicitaciones! Quiero que este equipo entrene al resto de su batallón en la activación de las armas láser.

El comandante sonrió ampliamente. — El resto de sus bebidas corre por mi cuenta esta noche. Nuevamente, gracias a todos por su rápida actuación. Los dejó sin palabras.

Finalmente, Jace dijo en voz alta: — ¡Cantinerero, otra ronda de tequila! Chocaron los puños entre ellos, riendo y disfrutando la noche. JD pensó para sí mismo: Sargento de Estado Mayor. Solo dos rangos más por alcanzar. Una vez que llegara a Primer Sargento, se uniría al cuerpo de oficiales y obtendría sus alas de piloto.

Afectados por los efectos del alcohol, decidieron regresar a la base. Tomaron una escalera mecánica en esa dirección. Berko dijo, señalando un estudio de arte: —¡Vamos a hacernos tatuajes para recordar esta misión, chicos!

Page 114 “Yea! Let's do this!” Each of them said, bumping fists all around. JD and Keyerra found themselves walking behind the group as they changed escalators. The liquor giving him courage, JD stopped and pulled her off the belt and onto a turnout. It was designed to allow you to stop and enjoy the city's view without interrupting the traffic flow. JD put his arm around her waist and pulled her close to him, their bodies touching. He asked in a low, sexy voice. “Why didn't you tell me who your parents were?” Keyerra put her arms around his waist and responded with a sexy drunken smile of her own and asked. “That first day at lunch, why didn't you tell me who your parents were?” “Well... I don't know why,” he said and stumbled a bit. “But you should have said something. I thought we were friends,” JD slurred. He drew his arms around her tighter. Keyerra could feel his body heat. Her arms tightened around his waist. She looked up, and he looked down. They stared into each other's eyes. JD closed his eyes and lowered his head... Suddenly, out of nowhere, Jace grabbed his shoulder. “Hey, no PDA, no public display of affection while in uniform.	Páginas 114 —¡Sí! ¡Hagámoslo! —dijeron todos, chocando los puños entre ellos. JD y Keyerra se quedaron caminando detrás del grupo mientras cambiaban de escalera mecánica. El alcohol le dio valor, y JD la detuvo, apartándola de la banda hacia una zona de descanso. Estaba diseñada para que uno pudiera detenerse y disfrutar de la vista de la ciudad sin interrumpir el flujo de personas. JD puso su brazo alrededor de su cintura y la acercó a él, con sus cuerpos tocándose. Le preguntó con una voz baja y seductora: —¿Por qué no me dijiste quiénes eran tus padres? Keyerra rodeó su cintura con los brazos y, con una sonrisa coqueta y un poco ebria, respondió con otra pregunta: —Ese primer día en el almuerzo, ¿por qué no me dijiste quiénes eran tus padres? Bueno... no sé por qué —dijo, tambaleándose un poco—. Pero debiste haber dicho algo. Pensé que éramos amigos —balbuceó JD. La rodeó con más fuerza entre sus brazos. Keyerra podía sentir el calor de su cuerpo. Ella también apretó sus brazos alrededor de su cintura. Levantó la mirada y él bajó la suya. Se quedaron mirándose a los ojos. JD cerró los ojos y bajó la cabeza... De repente, de la nada, Jace le agarró el hombro. —Oye, nada de PDA, nada de demostraciones públicas de afecto mientras están en uniforme.
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You know the regulations! And you two gonna miss our stop!" They hadn't even noticed she'd ridden back to them. JD reluctantly opened his eyes and dropped his arms. "Y'all need to catch up," Jace said.

JD was still looking into her eyes, and she continued holding on to him. His heart was beating fast.

Finally, Keyerra giggled, dropped her arms, turned unsteadily, and stepped back on the belt to catch up with the others.

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Chapter 15

As soon as Jason returned to Africa, he called his friends and said the same thing to each of them. "I have some important people I want y'all to meet. I also need to share some valuable information that will change everything.

This is important! So please come." Mussa used his yacht to transport everyone to Jason's private island. Mike and Jessica sat on a leather sofa, holding hands and enjoying the view and the music.

Herman and his lady friend stood leaning on the rail talking, and Jelena sat across from Mike as Mussa walked over carrying a tray of drinks.

"So, you think Jason has finally found someone to make him happy?" Mussa asked as he passed out the drinks.

¡Ya conocen las reglas! ¡Y ustedes dos van a perder nuestra parada!— Ni siquiera se habían dado cuenta de que ella había regresado hasta ellos.

JD abrió los ojos a regañadientes y bajó los brazos. —Tienen que alcanzarnos —dijo Jace.

JD seguía mirándola a los ojos, y ella continuaba aferrada a él. Su corazón latía con fuerza.

Finalmente, Keyerra soltó una risita, bajó los brazos, se giró con algo de inestabilidad y volvió a subirse a la cinta para alcanzar a los demás.

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Capítulo 15

Tan pronto como Jason regresó a África, llamó a sus amigos y les dijo lo mismo a cada uno de ellos: —Tengo a algunas personas importantes que quiero que conozcan. También necesito compartir información valiosa que lo cambiará todo.

¡Esto es importante! Así que, por favor, vengan.

Mussa utilizó su yate para transportar a todos a la isla privada de Jason. Mike y Jessica estaban sentados en un sofá de cuero, tomados de la mano y disfrutando de la vista y la música.

Herman y su acompañante estaban de pie, apoyados en la barandilla conversando, y Jelena estaba sentada frente a Mike mientras Mussa se acercaba llevando una bandeja con bebidas.

—Entonces, ¿crees que Jason finalmente encontró a alguien que lo haga feliz? —preguntó Mussa mientras repartía las bebidas.

“It’s possible. He has been missing in action a lot these past few months,” Mike commented. “I don’t think so. Jason would have told me if that were the case,” Jessica said. “Something else is up.” “Well, the man was very insistent that we all come tonight,” Jelena declared as she reached for the glass Mussa offered. “Whatever it is, it’s important to him.” The boat pulled up to Jason’s pier. The crew dropped the anchor, and everyone offloaded. Jason was standing on the dock, waiting on them as they made their way down the ramp. “Glad everyone could make it,” he said as he hugged and kissed each of them. “Please follow me. My guests are inside waiting to meet you all.” Though they often visited his magnificent tree house, the sheer beauty and design made them sigh contently. Everyone marveled as thousands of pinprick lights lit the structure like Christmas every evening.	—Es posible. Ha estado desaparecido en acción muchas veces en los últimos meses —comentó Mike. —No lo creo. Jason me lo habría dicho si fuera el caso —dijo Jessica—. Algo más está pasando. —Bueno, el hombre insistió mucho en que todos viniéramos esta noche —declaró Jelena mientras tomaba el vaso que Mussa le ofrecía—. Sea lo que sea, es importante para él. El yate llegó al muelle de Jason. La tripulación echó el ancla y todos desembarcaron. Jason estaba de pie en el muelle, esperándolos mientras bajaban por la rampa. —Me alegra que todos hayan podido venir —dijo mientras abrazaba y besaba a cada uno de ellos—. Por favor, síganme. Mis invitados están adentro esperando conocerlos a todos. Aunque visitaban con frecuencia su magnífica casa en el árbol, la pura belleza y el diseño los hacían suspirar de satisfacción. Todos se maravillaban mientras miles de pequeñas luces iluminaban la estructura como si fuera Navidad cada noche.
Page 116 “You know, when you retire, we are going to build a place just like this,” Jessica mumbled as she grabbed Mike’s arm and followed Jason toward his estate. This evening, Jason was in a hurry. They took the outside elevator up. Usually, they would take the wooden steps wrapped around all levels of the tree.	Páginas 116 —Sabes, cuando te retires, vamos a construir un lugar justo como este —murmuró Jessica mientras tomaba el brazo de Mike y seguía a Jason hacia su propiedad. Esa noche, Jason tenía prisa. Subieron por el ascensor exterior. Normalmente, habrían tomado las escaleras de madera que rodeaban todos los niveles del árbol.

His tree was over four hundred years old and had five primary branch levels.	Su árbol tenía más de cuatrocientos años y contaba con cinco niveles principales de ramas.
Each level had a wraparound balcony with a sitting area and exotic orchid gardens growing on the branches. Jessica loved seeing the night-blooming orange plants on level four and planned to visit them tonight.	Cada nivel tenía un balcón envolvente con un área para sentarse y jardines de orquídeas exóticas que crecían sobre las ramas. A Jessica le encantaba ver las plantas anaranjadas que florecían por la noche en el nivel cuatro y planeaba visitarlas esa misma noche.
But they headed up to the second level, where the kitchen and dining areas were located.	Pero se dirigieron al segundo nivel, donde se encontraban la cocina y el comedor.
A family of five stood as they exited the elevator. Mike and the rest began smiling as soon as they stepped into the room. "Everyone, I would like you to meet the descendants of..." Jason paused, thinking of how to say it. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "Jesus Christ."	Una familia de cinco personas se puso de pie cuando salieron del ascensor. Mike y los demás comenzaron a sonreír en cuanto entraron en la habitación. —A todos, me gustaría presentarles a los descendientes de... —Jason hizo una pausa, pensando cómo decirlo. Se encogió de hombros y dijo—: Jesucristo.
He turned and saw his friends looking at him with pained smiles. He looked back at the family. "Please do not manipulate them. We will need their help, and it must be their free will." Jason turned back to his friends and the smiles faded.	Se volvió y vio a sus amigos mirándolo con sonrisas tensas. Luego miró de nuevo a la familia. —Por favor, no los manipulen. Vamos a necesitar su ayuda, y debe ser por su propia voluntad. Jason volvió a mirar a sus amigos y las sonrisas desaparecieron.
"Thank you," he stated dryly. "What the hell was that?" Mike asked, looking around, confused. "Please take a seat, and before the evening is over, I promise everything will be clear," Jason implored them.	—Gracias —dijo con sequedad. —¿Qué demonios fue eso? —preguntó Mike, mirando alrededor, confundido. —Por favor, tomen asiento, y antes de que termine la noche, prometo que todo quedará claro —les imploró Jason.
Still dazed, they all walked over to a sitting area where chairs and couches were arranged to look out onto the ocean. Everyone took seats so his	Aún aturdidos, todos caminaron hacia una zona de estar donde las sillas y los sofás estaban dispuestos para contemplar el océano. Todos tomaron asiento, de modo que sus amigos

friends were sitting across from the visitors. Jason sat with the family.

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Jessica, his best friend, asked, "So, your theory proved true. You found the Q and proof Jesus was a man?" This time, the smile on her face was genuine.

Jason hunched his shoulders. "Yes and no ... this is John and his wife, Marie, and their children Luca, Chara, and you met Banjia earlier."

"Please, call me Ban," the younger girl spoke up.

They all greeted the family, and Herman asked. "I don't mean to be rude, but what proof do you have they are indeed related to Jesus?"

"Let me start from the beginning," Jason said.

He touched a control, and Ban's translation appeared at eye level.

"These are translated copies from chapter 13th of the last original Q Continuum book."

He looked at Jessica and said, "Yes, the one I have been searching for the past thirty years.

Well, I finally found it."

"A duplicate of the full translation has already been downloaded to each of you for your records. But to make this easy, I need everyone to please take the time to read the first two pages before we continue."

quedaron sentados frente a los visitantes. Jason se sentó junto a la familia.

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Jessica, su mejor amiga, preguntó:

—Entonces, tu teoría resultó ser cierta. ¿Encontraste la fuente Q y pruebas de que Jesús fue un hombre?

Esta vez, la sonrisa en su rostro era genuina.

Jason encogió los hombros.

—Sí y no... este es John y su esposa, Marie, y sus hijos Luca, Chara, y ya conocieron antes a Banjia.

—Por favor, llámame Ban —intervino la chica más joven.

Todos saludaron a la familia, y Herman preguntó:

—No quiero ser grosero, pero ¿qué pruebas tienes de que realmente están relacionados con Jesús?

—Permítanme empezar desde el principio —dijo Jason.

Tocó un control, y la traducción de Ban apareció a la altura de los ojos.

—Estas son copias traducidas del capítulo 13 del último libro original del Continuo Q.

Miró a Jessica y dijo:

—Sí, ese que he estado buscando durante los últimos treinta años.

Bueno, por fin lo encontré.

—Una copia de la traducción completa ya ha sido descargada para cada uno de ustedes, para sus registros. Pero para hacerlo más sencillo, necesito que todos se tomen el tiempo de leer las primeras dos páginas antes de continuar.

Mike was the first to speak when they all finished reading the translation. He looked around at everyone, shaking his head. “Are you telling me we are talking to aliens from outer space?” Before he could answer, Ban did something only she could do. She spoke into each of their minds. We are part Terlerian and part human, and we have never been to outer space; we were born on Earth. Jelena hopped up. “Did you just...did y’all...anybody else hear that!” Jelena’s head was on a swivel as she looked back and forth at everyone. Page 118 Jessica just threw up her arms and sat back, stunned. “Well, there is all the proof I need right there.” “Thank you for that demonstration, Ban.” Jason rolled his eyes. <i>You are welcome</i>, she answered in their minds while smiling sweetly. Mussa recovered his wits. “If what I just read is the truth, then y’all got a spaceship?” he asked hopefully. “And gold,” Herman interjected. The cook chose that moment to announce dinner was served, and Jason stod. “Let’s talk and eat. I am sure there are plenty of questions all around.”	Mike fue el primero en hablar cuando todos terminaron de leer la traducción. Miró a su alrededor, negando con la cabeza. —¿Me estás diciendo que estamos hablando con alienígenas del espacio exterior? Antes de que Jason pudiera responder, Ban hizo algo que solo ella podía hacer. Habló directamente en la mente de cada uno. —Somos en parte terlerianos y en parte humanos, y nunca hemos estado en el espacio exterior; nacimos en la Tierra. Jelena se levantó de un salto. —¿Acabas de...? ¿Ustedes...? ¿Alguien más escuchó eso? La cabeza de Jelena giraba de un lado a otro mientras miraba a todos. Página 118 Jessica simplemente levantó los brazos y se recostó, atónita. —Bueno, ahí está toda la prueba que necesito. —Gracias por esa demostración, Ban —dijo Jason, poniendo los ojos en blanco. —De nada —respondió ella en sus mentes, mientras sonreía dulcemente. Mussa recuperó la compostura. —Si lo que acabo de leer es cierto, entonces ¿ustedes tienen una nave espacial? —preguntó con esperanza. —Y oro —añadió Herman. En ese momento, el cocinero anunció que la cena estaba servida, y Jason se puso de pie. —Hablemos mientras comemos. Estoy seguro de que hay muchas preguntas por responder.
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They took their places around the formal dining table. Jason said a prayer to bless the food. “Your family has been living all this time in the mountains of Italy?” Jelena inquired. “Yes,” John answered. “Jesus established the town to keep his family and their secret safe. I am fully human. My family lines are farmers and winemakers. I fell in love with Marie in my teens and got permission to marry her from the elders. This has been our way for over two thousand years. But as you have read, it’s time to go.” “The earth is dying,” Luca said candidly. “Bishop Jason said you guys were brilliant and could figure out a way to help us. Did he speak the truth?” Herman stopped mid-bite, put his fork down, and looked at the younger man. “With your ship as a guide, it may be possible. We already knew the Earth was dying. The ozone layer will disappear and kill all animal life, years before the sun dies. We think we may have more like forty to fifty years remaining. We are in the planning stages of building a spaceship.” “In the next twenty years, our goal is to build a ship big enough to carry a discovery team, and the remaining population will stay here until we get word that they have found a suitable	Tomaron asiento alrededor de la mesa formal del comedor. Jason dijo una oración para bendecir los alimentos. —¿Tu familia ha vivido todo este tiempo en las montañas de Italia? —preguntó Jelena. —Sí —respondió John—. Jesús estableció el pueblo para mantener a su familia y su secreto a salvo. Yo soy completamente humano. Mi familia es de agricultores y vinicultores. Me enamoré de Marie en mi adolescencia y obtuve el permiso de los ancianos para casarme con ella. Así ha sido nuestra forma de vida durante más de dos mil años. Pero, como han leído, ha llegado el momento de irnos. —La Tierra está muriendo —dijo Luca con franqueza—. El obispo Jason dijo que ustedes son brillantes y que podrían encontrar una manera de ayudarnos. ¿Decía la verdad? Herman se detuvo a mitad de un bocado, dejó el tenedor y miró al joven. —Con su nave como guía, puede que sea posible. Ya sabíamos que la Tierra estaba muriendo. La capa de ozono desaparecerá y acabará con toda la vida animal, años antes de que el sol muera. Creemos que nos quedan entre cuarenta y cincuenta años. Estamos en las primeras etapas de planificación para construir una nave espacial. —En los próximos veinte años, nuestro objetivo es construir una nave lo suficientemente grande como para transportar un equipo de exploración. El resto de la población permanecerá aquí hasta que recibamos noticias de que han encontrado un planeta adecuado para vivir.
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Page 119 planet to live. Meanwhile, we hope to convince the rest of the nations to build or sponsor a spaceship so we can follow them. You may have just given us a way to make that happen faster and possibly a destination to aim for. And more importantly, save us precious time.” Mussa, already calculating probabilities, said, “If this information pans out, we hope to have a prototype in the next ten years.” Marie looked at Herman. “The family’s bankers supervise the gold you spoke of. Their line goes back to Zacchaeus of Jericho, who was brought here by Jesus for his skills in handling money. Their investments over the generations have kept us and the town very viable.” John continued as he smiled reassuringly at his youngest daughter. “Ban will be staying here with Bishop Jason, as you already know. And her talents are still growing. She will be a great help as you explore and learn the spaceship. When she was eight, she accidentally found the ship in the caves below the castle, and it became her Haven.” Ban looked defiant and spoke. “Where it goes, I go.” Marie put her arm around Ban’s shoulder. “About a year ago, God spoke to Father Lark. Afterward, he instructed	Página 119 Mientras tanto, esperamos convencer a otras naciones de construir o patrocinar naves espaciales para poder seguirlos. Puede que ustedes nos hayan dado una forma de acelerar ese proceso y, posiblemente, un destino al cual dirigirnos. Y, lo más importante, ganar un tiempo valioso. Mussa, que ya estaba calculando probabilidades, dijo: —Si esta información resulta ser cierta, esperamos tener un prototipo en los próximos diez años. Marie miró a Herman. —Los banqueros de la familia supervisan el oro del que hablaste. Su linaje se remonta a Zaqueo de Jericó, a quien Jesús trajo aquí por su habilidad para manejar el dinero. Sus inversiones a lo largo de las generaciones nos han mantenido a nosotros y al pueblo en una situación muy próspera. John continuó, sonriendo de manera tranquilizadora a su hija menor: —Ban se quedará aquí con el obispo Jason, como ya saben. Y sus talentos aún están desarrollándose. Será de gran ayuda mientras exploran y aprenden a manejar la nave espacial. —Cuando tenía ocho años, encontré accidentalmente la nave en las cuevas debajo del castillo, y se convirtió en su refugio. Ban levantó la mirada con determinación y dijo: —A donde vaya, yo voy. Marie rodeó los hombros de Ban con su brazo.
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us to let Ban start studying the scrolls Jesus left. So, hopefully, she can help you translate the ship's language. Our scientists could not grasp it, so we never flew the ship ourselves."

Marie pointed to the rest of the family. "We will return home to Italy and prepare those who may want to go on this journey with us. When the time comes, we will be ready. But most importantly, we wanted to meet the people who will be looking out for our baby."

Ban smiled brightly. "I plan on joining your Air Force just like JD. I want to work with him.

He seems nice, he is intelligent, and he's kinda cute." Marie and John rolled their eyes. Jelena and Jessica laughed out loud.

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Chapter 16

Unlike his friends, Herman lived in the middle of downtown Dakar. He loved the people of West Africa. They proved to be super intelligent and very adaptable. Being around them gave him vitality, and he thrived on it. His home was a city block in diameter. He was about to turn eighty, and his birthday parties were legendary.

"Honey, we have over a thousand requests for invitations to this year's bash.

—Hace aproximadamente un año, Dios le habló al padre Lark. Después de eso, nos indicó que dejáramos que Ban comenzara a estudiar los pergaminos que dejó Jesús. Así que, con suerte, podrá ayudarlos a traducir el lenguaje de la nave. Nuestros científicos no lograron comprenderlo, por eso nunca la volamos nosotros mismos.

Marie señaló al resto de la familia.

—Nosotros regresaremos a Italia y prepararemos a quienes deseen emprender este viaje con nosotros. Cuando llegue el momento, estaremos listos. Pero, sobre todo, queríamos conocer a las personas que cuidarán de nuestra niña.

Ban sonrió con entusiasmo.

—Planeo unirme a su Fuerza Aérea, igual que JD. Quiero trabajar con él. Parece amable, es inteligente... y es algo lindo.

Marie y John pusieron los ojos en blanco. Jelena y Jessica se rieron a carcajadas.

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Capítulo 16

A diferencia de sus amigos, Herman vivía en pleno centro de Dakar. Amaba a la gente de África Occidental. Habían demostrado ser extremadamente inteligentes y muy adaptables. Estar rodeado de ellos le daba vitalidad, y él prosperaba con ello. Su hogar ocupaba toda una manzana de la ciudad. Estaba a punto de cumplir ochenta años, y sus fiestas de cumpleaños eran legendarias.

—Cariño, tenemos más de mil solicitudes de invitación para la fiesta de este año.

Do you still want to keep it to a couple hundred or so?" His current flame, Sarr, said as she sat up in bed. "Yes, that's why you are in charge of the guest list. Half should be who's who, and the other half regular folks. Can you handle that?" "Yes, baby, just making sure." Herman walked over to the bed and kissed her tenderly. He looked down at her perky nipples, glanced at the time on his vid-screen, and then moaned. "Sorry, I gotta work. But I will be back for dessert... and maybe dinner." He kissed her on the forehead quickly and moved away from the bed. This year, he was dating a woman who was half his age. He would replace her after the party, which he did every year on his birthday. He was a single, rich old man who still enjoyed his life and the perks of his status. Thanks to Jelena's fountain of youth supplements, he was still feeling his oats. Herman looked in the mirror, brushed his long silver hair, put it into a ponytail, and finished dressing. He plugged into his WPC, and his arm screen automatically appeared. His mansion was electronically controlled with gadgets he or Mussa had invented. First, he touched the button to check the security inside his home. It showed two visitors signed in at 0800— hours. He then called his security chief for the estate. Page 121 "Morning, Kofi, I am heading to the lab and expect to be there all day."	¿Aún quieres limitarla a unas doscientas personas? —dijo su actual pareja, Sarr, incorporándose en la cama. —Sí, por eso tú estás a cargo de la lista de invitados. La mitad debe ser gente importante y la otra mitad personas comunes. ¿Puedes con eso? —Sí, amor, solo quería asegurarme. Herman se acercó a la cama y la besó con ternura. Miró hacia abajo, observó su cuerpo, echó un vistazo a la hora en su pantalla y luego gimió. —Lo siento, tengo que trabajar. Pero volveré para el postre... y quizá también para la cena. Le dio un beso rápido en la frente y se alejó de la cama. Ese año estaba saliendo con una mujer que tenía la mitad de su edad. La reemplazaría después de la fiesta, como hacía cada año en su cumpleaños. Era un hombre soltero, rico y mayor que aún disfrutaba de la vida y de los privilegios de su estatus. Gracias a los suplementos de juventud de Jelena, todavía se sentía lleno de energía. Herman se miró en el espejo, se cepilló su largo cabello plateado, se lo recogió en una cola y terminó de vestirse. Se conectó a su WPC, y la pantalla de su brazo apareció automáticamente. Su mansión estaba controlada electrónicamente con dispositivos que él o Mussa habían inventado. Primero, tocó un botón para revisar la seguridad dentro de su casa. Mostraba dos visitantes registrados a las 08:00. Luego llamó al jefe de seguridad de la propiedad. Página 121 —Buenos días, Kofi, voy camino al laboratorio y estaré allí todo el día.
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“Yes sir, the personal satellite shows everything is normal above the property. As expected, you have two visitors in the lab: Doctor Dallio in holo-form, and the girl who arrived in person thirty minutes ago.”

Herman went down the hall to a set of double doors and put his right eye up to the scanner. The door opened, and he stepped into his home office. He walked over and sat at the enormous desk shaped like a huge horseshoe. Herman placed his left hand on the ID scan in the center, and virtual control panels blinked over the entire surface.

Using his WPC, he focused on the panel he wanted to check and touched a button. The SDS shield control panel appeared at eye level. Everything looked normal. Per his routine, he called the chief operator of the Dakar space weapon.

“Morning, Captain Dada, anything to report?”

“No, sir, all systems report no activity. The New Union is safe.”

“Then it’s going to be a great day! Carry on.”

Herman left his office and headed to the lab. “The new project” was what he and Mussa called the alien ship, which had endless possibilities. The young girl, Ban, had proven to be invaluable.

She was every bit of JD’s equal in the lab, and just like him, she was a quick learner.

The instructions her ancestor left showed how to fly and maintain the ship.

—Sí, señor, el satélite personal muestra que todo está normal sobre la propiedad. Como se esperaba, tiene dos visitantes en el laboratorio: el doctor Dallio en forma holográfica y la chica que llegó en persona hace treinta minutos.

Herman recorrió el pasillo hasta unas puertas dobles y colocó su ojo derecho en el escáner. La puerta se abrió y entró en su oficina. Se acercó y se sentó en el enorme escritorio con forma de herradura. Colocó su mano izquierda en el escáner de identificación en el centro, y paneles de control virtuales parpadearon sobre toda la superficie.

Usando su WPC, se enfocó en el panel que quería revisar y presionó un botón. El panel de control del escudo SDS apareció a la altura de sus ojos. Todo parecía normal. Como parte de su rutina, llamó al operador jefe del arma espacial de Dakar.

—Buenos días, capitán Dada, ¿algo que reportar?

—No, señor, todos los sistemas reportan sin actividad. La Nueva Unión está segura.

—Entonces será un gran día. Continúe.

Herman salió de su oficina y se dirigió al laboratorio. “El nuevo proyecto” era como él y Mussa llamaban a la nave alienígena, que tenía posibilidades infinitas. La joven Ban había demostrado ser invaluable.

Era tan capaz como JD en el laboratorio y, al igual que él, aprendía con rapidez.

Las instrucciones que dejó su antepasado mostraban cómo volar y mantener la nave.

All she needed to do was figure out the language. She sat busily, programming the info from the scrolls into a code that allowed her to work faster. Herman took the elevator down to his lab. As he walked into the vast area, he saw Mussa and Ban were already hard at work, so he went to the coat rack and put on a lab coat. Page 122 “Well, well, well, the playboy of the year finally shows up to work.” Mussa’s holo looked up at him, smiling. “Mind your own, son, and stay outta grown folks’ business.” Ban looked up from her translating, surprised. <i>For real...!</i> she communicated via telepathy. <i>You can’t be serious. You must be a hundred years old. How can you be a playboy?</i> Herman looked at her and said sarcastically, “I am not your Uncle Jason or one of your little friends. You and Mussa need to keep your mind on work, or I will kick your little butt outta here, and you could cool your heels at that school all by yourself.” The virus did not affect Ban. She didn’t need to use the holo-chamber like other teens in the New Union. So, she went to school and had face-to-face lessons with the teachers while the other students were in holo-form.	Todo lo que necesitaba era descifrar el idioma. Estaba sentada, trabajando sin descanso, programando la información de los pergaminos en un código que le permitiera avanzar más rápido. Herman tomó el ascensor hacia su laboratorio. Al entrar en la amplia área, vio que Mussa y Ban ya estaban trabajando, así que fue a I perchero y se puso una bata. Página 122 —Vaya, vaya, el galán del año finalmente aparece en el trabajo —dijo Mussa desde su forma holográfica, sonriendo. —Ocúpate de lo tuyo, chico, y mantente fuera de los asuntos de adultos. Ban levantó la mirada de su traducción, sorprendida. —¿En serio...? —comunicó telepáticamente—. No puedes hablar en serio. Debes tener como cien años. ¿Cómo puedes ser un galán? Herman la miró y respondió con sarcasmo: —No soy tu tío Jason ni uno de tus amiguitos. Tú y Mussa necesitan concentrarse en el trabajo o los saco de aquí, y tendrás que quedarte en esa escuela tú sola. El virus no afectaba a Ban. No necesitaba usar la cámara holográfica como otros adolescentes de la Nueva Unión, así que asistía a clases presenciales mientras los demás estudiantes estaban en forma holográfica.
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“Sorry,” Ban said out loud. She was not offended, knowing it was an empty threat. Mr. Herman could sometimes be a gruff old man, but his mind was as active as hers, and she loved working with him. She dropped her head and went back to work.	—Lo siento —dijo Ban en voz alta. No se ofendió, sabiendo que era una amenaza vacía. El señor Herman a veces era un viejo gruñón, pero su mente era tan activa como la de ella, y le encantaba trabajar con él. Bajó la cabeza y volvió a su trabajo.
President Benson asked as he spoke to his operative in Dakar. “Is everything in place? We only have two weeks before the big party.” “Yes sir, all our people are in place. Everything is going according to plan.” “Good.” Benson nodded. “I will be sending the additional agents as planned. Keep me posted on any new developments.”	El presidente Benson preguntó mientras hablaba con su agente en Dakar: —¿Está todo en su lugar? Solo tenemos dos semanas antes de la gran fiesta. —Sí, señor, toda nuestra gente está en posición. Todo va según lo planeado. —Bien —asintió Benson—. Enviaré a los agentes adicionales como estaba previsto. Manténgame informado de cualquier novedad.
He cut the transmission on his WPC. Benson was one of the few people in America who had a unit. However, he needed it because it was the only effective way to communicate in West Africa. He called Mathis next on a regular line.	Cortó la transmisión en su WPC. Benson era una de las pocas personas en América que tenía una unidad. Sin embargo, la necesitaba porque era la única forma eficaz de comunicarse en África Occidental. Luego llamó a Mathis por una línea normal.
“Get ready to leave. Your instructions are	—Prepárate para salir. Tus instrucciones están
Page 123	Página 123
in the regular place. When you get there, make sure everyone understands their role and knows the consequences if they fail. Nothing can be left to chance.”	en el lugar de siempre. Cuando llegues, asegúrate de que todos entiendan su papel y conozcan las consecuencias si fallan. No se puede dejar nada al azar.
“Yes sir,” Mathis responded and clicked off.	—Sí, señor —respondió Mathis y colgó.
He had been upset because Benson kept him out of the loop. But finally, the time had come. He would finally get to end Avery Johnson. Mathis took a deep	Había estado molesto porque Benson lo mantenía al margen. Pero por fin había llegado el momento. Finalmente podría acabar con Avery Johnson.

and determined breath. He stood and stared out the window.	Mathis respiró hondo, decidido. Se puso de pie y se quedó mirando por la ventana.
“Yep, it’s time for him to die,” he said out loud.	—Sí... es hora de que muera —dijo en voz alta.
Obi walked into his three-bedroom home in Togo and heard loud Latin music. In the kitchen, his mother was dancing and preparing dinner. He had not seen her this happy and content since he was a little boy. He stood momentarily and watched, but he did not disturb her. He went directly to his room and shut the door.	Obi entró en su casa de tres habitaciones en Togo y escuchó música latina a todo volumen. En la cocina, su madre bailaba mientras preparaba la cena. No la había visto tan feliz y tranquila desde que era un niño. Se quedó observando un momento, pero no la interrumpió. Fue directamente a su habitación y cerró la puerta.
He sat on his bed and reread the message on the communicator. His handler had given him more responsibility. But he didn’t want to do this, but he had no choice. He was in too deep.	Se sentó en la cama y volvió a leer el mensaje en el comunicador. Su superior le había dado más responsabilidad. No quería hacer esto, pero no tenía elección. Estaba demasiado involucrado.
The meeting tonight discussed his exact role in the next Ops mission. According to the info chip, they were going to steal a key component for an important weapon and assassinate three of the most important leaders in the New Union in one night at the same time. He knew who those leaders were and didn’t like it one bit.	En la reunión de esa noche se discutiría su papel exacto en la próxima misión. Según el chip de información, iban a robar un componente clave para un arma importante y asesinar a tres de los líderes más importantes de la Nueva Unión en una sola noche, al mismo tiempo. Él sabía quiénes eran esos líderes y no le gustaba en absoluto.
The group met at a small hostel in the heart of Dakar to get the details. It consisted of himself, a woman named Sarr, and a driver named Ekon. A new operative, Mathis, would be in charge. Mathis spoke to the small group assembled around him.	El grupo se reunió en un pequeño hostel en el corazón de Dakar para recibir los detalles. Estaban él, una mujer llamada Sarr y un conductor llamado Ekon. Un nuevo agente, Mathis, estaría a cargo. Mathis habló al pequeño grupo reunido frente a él:
“Ok, I will go over everything one more time. This is very important, Sarr. Once you have the package, send us a message. As you descend the staircase, pass the parcel to me. I will	—Bien, voy a repasar todo una vez más. Esto es muy importante, Sarr. Cuando tengas el paquete, envíanos un mensaje. Mientras bajas por la escalera, pásamelo. Yo estaré

be in disguise—I will be dressed as a guard at the bottom of the stairs.”

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“When she starts walking down the stairs. That will be everyone’s signal to get into position. Again, do each of you know your target?”

He looked around the room. They all indicated they knew who they were going to assassinate.

“As soon as the power is cut, take action. Put on the night goggles. Make sure to attach the silencer to the weapon and take out your target. Go to the stairway exit on the south side of the room and walk down two floors. Calmly enter the foyer and walk out the door. Once outside, the car will be waiting. You will have three minutes to escape before the power is restored.”

He turned to the driver.

“You will wait exactly three minutes, and that’s it. Anyone not in the car, you will leave.” Mathis sat back and pointedly looked each person in the eyes. They all stared back at him intently.

“If you are thinking of changing your mind, let me remind you of your family. We will have them in our custody and safely take them to Mauritania. When your mission is completed, you will join them.”

“We have arranged for safe passage for each of you in the same country. It’s just outside the New Union territory. You may travel back to America or any of our allied countries from there. If you don’t make it back from this mission, your family will die.”

disfrazado; estaré vestido como un guardia al pie de las escaleras.

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—Cuando ella empiece a bajar las escaleras, esa será la señal para que todos se pongan en posición. De nuevo, ¿cada uno sabe cuál es su objetivo?

Miró alrededor de la sala. Todos indicaron que sabían a quién debían eliminar.

—En cuanto se corte la electricidad, actúen. Pónganse las gafas nocturnas. Asegúrense de colocar el silenciador en el arma y eliminen a su objetivo. Diríjase a la salida de la escalera en el lado sur de la sala y bajen dos pisos. Entren con calma al vestíbulo y salgan por la puerta. Una vez afuera, el coche estará esperando. Tendrán tres minutos para escapar antes de que vuelva la electricidad.

Se giró hacia el conductor.

—Esperarás exactamente tres minutos, ni uno más. Quien no esté en el coche, se queda.

Mathis se recostó y miró fijamente a cada uno a los ojos. Todos le devolvieron la mirada con intensidad.

—Si están pensando en cambiar de opinión, déjenme recordarles a sus familias. Las tendremos bajo nuestra custodia y las trasladaremos de forma segura a Mauritania.

Cuando completen la misión, se reunirán con ellas.

—Hemos organizado un paso seguro para cada uno en ese mismo país. Está justo fuera del territorio de la Nueva Unión. Desde allí podrán viajar de regreso a América o a cualquiera de nuestros países aliados. Si no regresan de esta misión, sus familias morirán.

Obi lowered his head, and there was no doubt Mathis meant what he said—the time he'd been afraid of had come.

Over the past two years, Obi's life had changed. He and his mother were finally on their feet and living comfortably. Now they wanted him to kill someone and it could very well destroy Keyerra.

She had become someone he had grown to have feelings for. It wasn't love. She was too young for his taste. They had had sex once. And he hated being the one who took her virginity.

She was a determined and gorgeous young woman. Once she made up her mind about something, she went for it. He couldn't refuse her when she had awkwardly stripped in front of him one night, and did a sexy little dance. Then said to him in a low, sensual voice,

"Tonight is the night you make me a woman." Obi had obliged.

He sat on the side of his bed, trying to think of a way out. Should he call and warn her? Obi got up and paced around the room a few times. He stopped in front of the mirror and gazed at his reflection for a full minute. Finally, looking at his reflection, he said,

"I'm sorry, Keyerra. I have to do this. They will have my momma, and I can't let them hurt her."

He wiped the moisture from his eyes, picked up his communicator, and called Keyerra.

"Hey, babe, are we still on for tomorrow night?"

Obi bajó la cabeza. No había duda de que Mathis hablaba en serio: el momento que tanto temía había llegado.

En los últimos dos años, la vida de Obi había cambiado. Él y su madre por fin se habían estabilizado y vivían con cierta comodidad. Y ahora querían que matara a alguien... y eso podría destruir a Keyerra.

Ella se había convertido en alguien por quien había empezado a sentir algo. No era amor; era demasiado joven para su gusto. Habían tenido relaciones una vez, y él odiaba haber sido quien le quitó la virginidad.

Era una joven decidida y hermosa. Cuando se proponía algo, iba tras ello sin dudar. Él no pudo negarse cuando una noche ella se desnudó torpemente frente a él y hizo un pequeño baile sensual. Luego le dijo en voz baja y seductora:

—Esta noche es la noche en que me harás mujer.
Obi accedió.

Se sentó al borde de la cama, tratando de encontrar una salida. ¿Debería llamarla y advertirle? Obi se levantó y caminó por la habitación varias veces. Se detuvo frente al espejo y se quedó mirando su reflejo durante un minuto completo. Finalmente, mirándose, dijo:

—Lo siento, Keyerra. Tengo que hacerlo. Tendrán a mi mamá, y no puedo dejar que le hagan daño.

Se secó la humedad de los ojos, tomó su comunicador y llamó a Keyerra.

—Hola, cariño, ¿seguimos en pie para mañana por la noche?

I think it's time for me to meet your parents. If we're considering moving in together, we should all meet." He could hear the smile in her voice. "Yes, of course, your name is on the list." Keyerra was smiling widely. She cut the link, and her whole body trembled. He was finally ready to let the world know they were a couple. She was especially happy because she thought she might be pregnant. She hadn't told anyone. In the New Union, she was supposed to have permission to have a child. Now, she would have someone to fight by her side so she could keep the baby. Chapter 17 The day of the big party was practically a holiday in Dakar. Herman had over twenty thousand employees who worked for him in West Africa. On his birthday, they all had the day off. News and entertainment bots swarmed the airways above Herman's home. It was the only day of the year his home went offline. He turned off the small security satellite over his estate to allow the news bots to record the A-list people landing on his rooftop to attend the celebration. "How do I look?" Sarr entered the bedroom in a stunning, backless, full-length royal blue sequined dress that hugged all the right curves. "Wow! I swear you get more and more beautiful every day."	Creo que ya es hora de conocer a tus padres. Si estamos pensando en mudarnos juntos, deberíamos conocernos todos. Podía escuchar la sonrisa en su voz. —Sí, claro, tu nombre ya está en la lista. Keyerra sonreía ampliamente. Cortó la comunicación y todo su cuerpo tembló. Por fin él estaba listo para que el mundo supiera que eran pareja. Estaba especialmente feliz porque pensaba que podría estar embarazada. No se lo había dicho a nadie. En la Nueva Unión, debía tener permiso para tener un hijo. Ahora tendría a alguien a su lado para luchar y poder conservar al bebé. Capítulo 17 El día de la gran fiesta era prácticamente un día festivo en Dakar. Herman tenía más de veinte mil empleados trabajando para él en África Occidental. En su cumpleaños, todos tenían el día libre. Bots de noticias y entretenimiento inundaban el espacio aéreo sobre la casa de Herman. Era el único día del año en que su hogar se desconectaba. Apagó el pequeño satélite de seguridad sobre su propiedad para permitir que los bots de noticias grabaran a las celebridades que llegaban a su azotea para asistir a la celebración. —¿Cómo me veo? —Sarr entró al dormitorio con un impresionante vestido largo azul real, con lentejuelas, sin espalda, que se ajustaba perfectamente a sus curvas. —¡Guau! Te juro que cada día te ves más hermosa.
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“Thank you, you look quite dashing yourself.” “Come here, I have something special for you.” She took her time as she sauntered over to him. “Turn around and face the mirror.” Sarr did as she was told, and he produced a huge blue diamond pendant attached to a silver chain necklace. He stood close behind her, placed it around her neck, fastened the clasp, and stood back. “Wow, nobody has ever given me anything quite so exquisite. This is perfect, I love you.” She knew it was from one of his diamond mines worth at least one million unions. A single tear rolled down her lovely face. She got on her tiptoes and kissed him deeply. “You are more than welcome.” He smiled down at her. It was his last present to her. He had already found his next plaything. “We need to get downstairs; our guests are starting to arrive.” “Go on without me, I need to refresh my make-up. I will be down in a minute.” “Ok.” Herman finger brushed out his long hair and let it flow past his shoulders. He put on his blue tux jacket, turned, and left the room. Page 127 Sarr waited a full minute to make sure he was gone. With the house offline for this one day, Herman relied on human guards, and she had hired them.	—Gracias, tú también te ves muy elegante. —Ven aquí, tengo algo especial para ti. Ella se acercó con paso lento y elegante. —Date la vuelta y mírate al espejo. Sarr hizo lo que le pidió, y él sacó un enorme colgante de diamante azul sujeto a una cadena de plata. Se colocó detrás de ella, se lo puso alrededor del cuello, abrochó el cierre y se apartó. —Guau... nadie me había dado algo tan exquisito. Es perfecto, me encanta. Te amo. Sabía que provenía de una de sus minas de diamantes y que valía al menos un millón de unions. Una lágrima rodó por su hermoso rostro. Se puso de puntillas y lo besó profundamente. —De nada —respondió él sonriendo. Era su último regalo para ella. Ya había encontrado a su siguiente entretenimiento. —Debemos bajar, nuestros invitados están empezando a llegar. —Ve tú primero, necesito retocar mi maquillaje. Bajo en un minuto. —Ok. Herman pasó los dedos por su largo cabello y lo dejó caer sobre sus hombros. Se puso la chaqueta azul de su esmoquin, se dio la vuelta y salió de la habitación. Página 127 Sarr esperó un minuto completo para asegurarse de que se había ido. Con la casa desconectada por ese día, Herman dependía de guardias humanos, y ella misma los había contratado.
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She walked past the two men guarding his private office. They never moved a muscle. She went directly to Herman's favorite painting. It was a beautiful tableau by Kara Walker depicting the exodus of POC from the US. Behind it was an antique cast iron Arabian wall safe from the 1900s. It had no electronic gadgets to protect it—just an old-fashioned combination safe that was as old as he was. At first, this surprised her because he was such a high-tech guy and security was his profession. Sarr had gotten its location and the series of numbers that unlocked it using miniature security cameras Herman developed. They were no bigger than her fingernails. She'd placed them throughout the house during the year they'd been together and knew his daily routine better than he did. She quickly opened the safe, knowing it contained money, personal papers, and a tray of diamonds. Reaching into the back of the old safe, she found the spare motherboard for the SDS. It was no bigger than a shoebox made of clear, thin, flexible plastic, about eight inches long. She carefully rolled it up and placed it in a tube. She sent a group message on her way to the main hall, "I have it." Sarr paused as she looked down the stairs into the great hall. Lots of people milled around all in formal attire. Some danced to music played by a ten-piece band, and some snacked from one of	Caminó junto a los dos hombres que vigilaban su oficina privada. No se movieron ni un músculo. Se dirigió directamente a la pintura favorita de Herman. Era un hermoso cuadro de Kara Walker que representaba el éxodo de personas de color desde Estados Unidos. Detrás había una antigua caja fuerte árabe de hierro fundido de principios del siglo XX. No tenía dispositivos electrónicos de protección, solo una combinación tradicional, tan antigua como él. Al principio, esto la sorprendió, porque él era un hombre de alta tecnología y la seguridad era su profesión. Sarr había conseguido la ubicación y la combinación gracias a unas diminutas cámaras de seguridad que Herman había desarrollado. No eran más grandes que sus uñas. Las había colocado por toda la casa durante el año que llevaban juntos y conocía su rutina diaria mejor que él mismo. Abrió rápidamente la caja fuerte, sabiendo que contenía dinero, documentos personales y una bandeja de diamantes. Metiendo la mano al fondo, encontró la placa base de repuesto del SDS. No era más grande que una caja de zapatos, hecha de plástico transparente, delgado y flexible, de unos veinte centímetros de largo. La enrolló con cuidado y la guardó en un tubo. Mientras se dirigía al salón principal, envió un mensaje grupal: "Lo tengo." Sarr se detuvo al mirar desde las escaleras hacia el gran salón. Muchas personas caminaban de un lado a otro, todas vestidas de gala. Algunos bailaban al ritmo de una banda de diez
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four long buffet tables around the hall. She saw that Herman was the center of attention of a group in the middle of the room.

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Mathis stood at the bottom of the staircase, searching for someone.

His appearance had changed entirely, even his skin color. She wouldn't have recognized him if he had not told her where he would be standing.

He walked closer to the stairs and took her hand as she descended the last few steps. In one hand, she carried a blue lace wrap. Under it, she held a black tube about eight inches long. She slipped the tube to him and hurried over to Herman.

King Omar and his daughter, Sahar, dressed in their homeland's traditional white formal wear.

They stood with Herman, Mike, Jessica, and Jason. They all looked elegant and were dressed in the latest Senegalese formal wear.

"So, what's it like being the Supreme Ruler of Saudi Arabia?" Herman asked Omar as Sahar walked over with her long, dark, curly hair flowing down her back to join them.

"It is better now that we have peace and are no longer fighting each other," Omar responded.

Sahar smiled and said, "Father is being modest. He has brought the country into a new era since releasing all remaining oil mines from government control. Religious factions are working together. Women have the same rights as men, and it was all fathers doing."

músicos y otros picaban comida de una de las cuatro largas mesas de buffet distribuidas por el salón. Vio que Herman era el centro de atención de un grupo en medio de la sala.

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Mathis estaba al pie de la escalera, buscando a alguien.

Su apariencia había cambiado por completo, incluso el color de su piel. Ella no lo habría reconocido si él no le hubiera dicho dónde estaría.

Él se acercó a la escalera y tomó su mano cuando ella bajó los últimos escalones. En una mano, ella llevaba un chal de encaje azul. Debajo, sostenía un tubo negro de unos veinte centímetros. Se lo deslizó y se apresuró hacia Herman.

El rey Omar y su hija Sahar, vestidos con la vestimenta formal blanca tradicional de su país.

Estaban junto a Herman, Mike, Jessica y Jason. Todos lucían elegantes con lo último de la moda formal senegalesa.

—Entonces, ¿cómo es ser el gobernante supremo de Arabia Saudita? —preguntó Herman a Omar mientras Sahar se acercaba con su largo cabello oscuro y rizado cayendo por su espalda para unirse al grupo.

—Es mejor ahora que tenemos paz y ya no estamos luchando entre nosotros —respondió Omar.

Sahar sonrió y añadió: —Padre está siendo modesto. Ha llevado al país a una nueva era al liberar todas las minas de petróleo del control gubernamental. Las facciones religiosas están trabajando juntas. Las mujeres tienen los mismos derechos

Mike smiled at her. “Look who’s talking. Thanks to you, I see that BG Inc.’s profits this year are up almost thirty percent. Success must run in the family.” JD, Keyerra, Jace, Jacobie, and Obi, all in their dress blue uniforms, stood in a separate group and talked. “How long will we have to stay at this old folks’ party?” Jacobie whined. “The proper protocol is to stay until the toast is made and the cake is cut,” Jace said. Jacobie looked at her and rolled his eyes. “How do you know? We aren’t even plugged in. Today, all our systems are offline as long as we are in this house.” “I asked my mother.” She rolled her eyes back at him and sucked her teeth. Page 129 Obi stood there not saying anything. He was nervous and kept looking at his WPC band, checking the time. Keyerra leaned closer to him and said quietly, “We should be able to leave in about an hour.” He looked up and finally saw the woman start to walk down the stairs. He bent to kiss her tenderly on her forehead and thought, <i>I’m so sorry, Keyerra, but it’s your mom or mine.</i> But out loud he said, “I would like to meet your godmother and thank her for	que los hombres, y todo ha sido gracias a él. Mike le sonrió. —Mira quién habla. Gracias a ti, veo que las ganancias de BG Inc. este año han subido casi un treinta por ciento. El éxito debe venir de familia. JD, Keyerra, Jace, Jacobie y Obi, todos con sus uniformes azules de gala, estaban en otro grupo conversando. —¿Cuánto tiempo tendremos que quedarnos en esta fiesta de viejos? —se quejó Jacobie. —El protocolo adecuado es quedarse hasta que se haga el brindis y se corte el pastel —dijo Jace. Jacobie la miró y puso los ojos en blanco. —¿Y tú cómo sabes? Ni siquiera estamos conectados. Hoy todos nuestros sistemas están fuera de línea mientras estemos en esta casa. —Se lo pregunté a mi madre —respondió ella, devolviéndole la mirada con fastidio. Página 129 Obi estaba en silencio. Estaba nervioso y no dejaba de mirar su pulsera WPC para revisar la hora. Keyerra se inclinó hacia él y susurró: —Deberíamos poder irnos en aproximadamente una hora. Él levantó la vista y finalmente vio a la mujer comenzar a bajar las escaleras. Se inclinó para besarla suavemente en la frente y pensó: <i>Lo siento mucho, Keyerra, pero es tu madre o la mía.</i> Pero en voz alta dijo: —Me gustaría conocer a tu madrina y
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raising you,” as he looked intensely into her lovely dark eyes. She gushed. “Ah... that’s so sweet. My godmother is standing over there.” She pointed in the direction of one of the tables. “Let’s go over, and I will introduce you.” JD watched them go. Jace and Jacobie watched him watching the couple. Jacobie reached up and chucked his shoulder. “Man, every young lady in this room would do anything to jump on your line. And you only got eyes for someone who is already hooked. Boyo, your heart is on a fool’s errand,” he said, taking another swallow of his drink. Jessica also looked at her son and saw the sadness in his eyes, so she beckoned to him. He went over as Obi and General Ore were shaking hands at the nearby buffet table. His mother took a few steps toward him. “Hey, is everything ok, Mr. Fly Guy?” she asked, trying to lighten his mood. “Yes, Mother, everything is fine.” But he kept looking over at Keyerra. Suddenly, everything went dark! JD screamed out, “Mother!” He grabbed her arm before anyone could push them apart. Jessica hugged his arm tightly to her. The people inside the pitch-black hall began to panic and started running and pushing people blindly. He knew most people were headed to the elevators, and he also knew they wouldn’t be functional.	agradecerle por haberte criado — mientras la miraba intensamente a los ojos. Ella se emocionó: —Ah... qué dulce. Mi madrina está allá. —Señaló hacia una de las mesas—. Vamos, te la presentaré. JD los observó alejarse. Jace y Jacobie lo vieron observando a la pareja. Jacobie le dio un golpecito en el hombro. —Hombre, todas las chicas jóvenes en este salón harían lo que fuera por estar contigo. Y tú solo tienes ojos para alguien que ya está comprometida. Hermano, tu corazón va directo al desastre —dijo, dando otro trago a su bebida. Jessica también miró a su hijo y notó la tristeza en sus ojos, así que lo llamó con un gesto. Él se acercó mientras Obi y el general Ore se estrechaban la mano cerca de la mesa del buffet. Su madre dio unos pasos hacia él. —Oye, ¿todo está bien, señor galán? — preguntó, intentando animarlo. —Sí, madre, todo está bien — respondió, pero seguía mirando hacia Keyerra. De repente, ¡todo quedó a oscuras! JD gritó: —¡Mamá! La tomó del brazo antes de que alguien pudiera separarlos. Jessica se aferró con fuerza a él. Las personas dentro del salón, ahora completamente a oscuras, comenzaron a entrar en pánico, corriendo y empujándose a ciegas. Él sabía que la mayoría se dirigía a los ascensores... y también sabía que no funcionarían.
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Page 130 It was loud, so he yelled in her ear, “We are going to head toward the stairs. Whatever you do, don’t let go of my arm!” “OK!” she yelled back. He had been in this room many times and knew how far they were from the stair exit doors. His heart was beating hard. JD reached out blindly and began to slowly walk against the tide of people heading the other way. He heard someone crash into a buffet table nearby and dishes breaking. They kept walking slowly. About halfway across the room, JD almost tripped over something. He heard a female voice asking for his help just below him. He reached down and felt someone. He took her hand and pulled her up. “The woman grabbed his arm tightly and held on for dear life. Thank you, thank you so much, I couldn’t get up, people kept knocking me back down.” “We are headed to the stairs, and you should come with us. Hopefully, the lights will be on soon.” She hugged his arm tighter, and they continued toward the back wall and the stairs in the dark. After another minute of pure chaos, the backup systems kicked in and the lights came on.	Página 130 Aquí tienes la traducción al español, clara, natural y fiel: Era muy ruidoso, así que le gritó al oído: —Vamos a dirigirnos hacia las escaleras. ¡Hagas lo que haga, no sueltes mi brazo! —¡OK! —gritó ella de vuelta. Él había estado en esa sala muchas veces y sabía qué tan lejos estaban de las puertas de salida hacia las escaleras. Su corazón latía con fuerza. JD extendió la mano a ciegas y comenzó a avanzar lentamente en contra de la corriente de personas que se dirigían en sentido contrario. Escuchó a alguien chocar contra una mesa de buffet cercana y el sonido de platos rompiéndose. Siguieron avanzando despacio. A mitad del salón, JD casi tropezó con algo. Escuchó la voz de una mujer pidiendo ayuda justo debajo de él. Se agachó, la tocó y la ayudó a levantarse. La mujer se aferró a su brazo con fuerza, como si su vida dependiera de ello. —Gracias, muchas gracias, no podía levantarme, la gente no dejaba de tirarme al suelo. —Nos dirigimos a las escaleras, deberías venir con nosotros. Con suerte, las luces volverán pronto. Ella apretó aún más su brazo y continuaron hacia la pared del fondo y las escaleras en la oscuridad. Después de otro minuto de puro caos, los sistemas de respaldo se activaron y las luces se encendieron.
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JD kissed the top of his mom's head and let go of the attractive woman holding his other arm. He then looked around, and what he saw horrified him.

Lying in a pool of blood was his Uncle Herman!

He heard Keyerra scream. "Oh God, somebody help me...Please! My mother has been shot!"

JD saw his father rush over to Herman; he got on his knees, trying to stop the bleeding in his chest. So he ran to Keyerra. She was on her knees, shaking her mother's shoulder softly, saying her name over and over.

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He looked down at General Ore. Her eyes were open with a vacant look. A bullet hole was in her left temple, and blood drizzled out. JD quickly reached down and checked her pulse. As he expected, there was none. He used his thumb and forefinger to close her eyes, took off his jacket, and placed it over the General's upper body and head. He stood and took Keyerra in his arms and held her tightly.

"I am so sorry," he whispered.

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Chapter 18

"Call an ambulance now!" Mike shouted. He held his hands over the wound, but the blood kept running through his fingers. Jacobie ran over, removed his jacket, and passed it to Mike.

JD besó la parte superior de la cabeza de su madre y soltó a la atractiva mujer que sostenía su otro brazo. Luego miró a su alrededor... y lo que vio lo horrorizó.

¡Tirado en un charco de sangre estaba su tío Herman!

Escuchó a Keyerra gritar: —¡Oh Dios, alguien ayúdeme... por favor! ¡Mi madre ha recibido un disparo! JD vio a su padre correr hacia Herman; se arrodilló, intentando detener la hemorragia en su pecho. Entonces él corrió hacia Keyerra. Ella estaba de rodillas, sacudiendo suavemente el hombro de su madre, repitiendo su nombre una y otra vez.

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Miró hacia abajo a la general Ore. Sus ojos estaban abiertos, con una mirada vacía. Tenía un orificio de bala en la sien izquierda, y la sangre corría lentamente. JD se agachó rápidamente y comprobó su pulso. Como esperaba, no había ninguno. Con el pulgar y el índice, cerró sus ojos, se quitó la chaqueta y la colocó sobre la parte superior de su cuerpo y su cabeza. Luego se levantó y tomó a Keyerra entre sus brazos, abrazándola con fuerza.

—Lo siento mucho —susurró.

Página 132

Capítulo 18

—¡Llaman a una ambulancia ahora! —gritó Mike.

Presionaba la herida con las manos, pero la sangre seguía filtrándose entre sus dedos. Jacobie corrió hacia él, se quitó la chaqueta y se la entregó.

“Use this, sir, to help stop the bleeding.” Mike looked up at him.	—Use esto, señor, para ayudar a detener la hemorragia. Mike levantó la vista.
“Come here, Jacobie, take over and keep pressure on the wound.” He moved over while the young man got into position. “Ok, sir, I got it.” Mike stood and quickly walked over to Jessica. “Are you okay?”	—Ven aquí, Jacobie, toma el control y mantén la presión sobre la herida. Se hizo a un lado mientras el joven ocupaba su lugar. —Ok, señor, ya lo tengo. Mike se levantó y caminó rápidamente hacia Jessica. —¿Estás bien?
She indicated she was fine. He called his guard to him. “Get this place back online, now! And call the ASC police. Nobody is to leave this building.”	Ella indicó que sí. Llamó a su guardia: —¡Vuelve a poner este lugar en línea, ahora! Y llama a la policía de la ASC. Nadie debe salir de este edificio.
He turned back to his wife, who looked in shock. “Are you sure you’re okay?” She took a deep breath and let it out slowly.	Se giró de nuevo hacia su esposa, que parecía en shock. —¿Estás segura de que estás bien? Ella respiró profundamente y soltó el aire lentamente.
“Yes, I am fine, but who would do this?” Tears stung her eyes.	—Sí, estoy bien... pero ¿quién haría algo así? —Las lágrimas le ardían en los ojos.
“I have an idea of who it was. Can you get word to your news bots to record anyone leaving the premises?” “That’s their job. But we won’t see anything until the systems are back up.”	—Tengo una idea de quién fue. ¿Puedes avisar a tus bots de noticias para que graben a cualquiera que salga del recinto? —Ese es su trabajo. Pero no veremos nada hasta que los sistemas vuelvan a funcionar.
Mike looked around at all the frightened people. He called his son and Jace over.	Mike miró alrededor a todas las personas asustadas. Llamó a su hijo y a Jace.
“I need y’all to get everyone downstairs into the atrium, but no one is to leave. Do you understand? When the ambulances get here, send them up ASAP.”	—Necesito que lleven a todos abajo, al atrio, pero nadie debe salir. ¿Entendido? Cuando lleguen las ambulancias, háganlas subir de inmediato.

“Yes sir,” they both said in unison. They enlisted the help of some of the wait staff to help get everyone down to the huge foyer area. JD guarded the front exit and had a staff member he knew guard the stairwell doors While	—Sí, señor —respondieron ambos al unísono. Reclutaron a parte del personal para ayudar a llevar a todos al enorme vestíbulo. JD vigiló la salida principal y puso a un miembro del personal que conocía a vigilar las puertas de las escaleras, mientras
Page 133 Jace walked around, trying to keep everyone calm. “Sorry, everyone. No one is allowed to exit until the police arrive.	Página 133 Jace caminaba tratando de mantener la calma. —Lo siento, todos. Nadie está autorizado a salir hasta que llegue la policía.
Please make yourselves as comfortable as possible until then. “The guests finally began to settle down.	Por favor, pónganse lo más cómodos posible hasta entonces. Los invitados finalmente comenzaron a calmarse.
They sat or stood, quietly discussing the evening's events. After a few minutes, someone announced that the systems were back online. Everyone exhaled and quickly plugged in.	Se sentaron o permanecieron de pie, comentando en voz baja los acontecimientos de la noche. Después de unos minutos, alguien anunció que los sistemas estaban nuevamente en línea. Todos exhalaban aliviados y se conectaron rápidamente.
The ambulances arrived, and the emergency personnel were quickly sent to the third floor. Not very much time passed when the medics came rushing back down.	Las ambulancias llegaron, y el personal de emergencia fue enviado rápidamente al tercer piso. No pasó mucho tiempo antes de que los paramédicos bajaran apresuradamente.
First, they brought down Herman. There was still some blood running from the now bandaged wound in his chest. An IV was hooked up to him and his eyes remained closed. The air ambulance quickly lifted off, sirens blasting.	Primero trajeron a Herman. Aún había algo de sangre filtrándose desde la herida en su pecho, ahora vendada. Tenía un suero conectado y sus ojos permanecían cerrados. La ambulancia aérea despegó rápidamente, con las sirenas sonando.

The second body was brought down. It was covered head to toe in a white sheet. Keyerra was slowly walking behind it, crying inconsolably. Jessica was holding her tightly around her waist. JD's heart broke for her. The two women got into the back of the second ambulance with the body. Finally, Jacobie, Mike, and his bodyguard came down using the stairwell. "This is how they left the room," he said as he approached his son. Mike was a former Army Intelligence Officer, and all his training kicked in as he quickly organized the crowd. He stood on a low area table so his voice could be heard. "All guests, I need y'all to move to this side of the room!" he pointed. "All those working here today, I need y'all to sit over in this area of the room." He accessed the guest list released to the press earlier in the week on his WPC. He instructed JD and Jace to do the same. "Check all guests. I need the names of those who are not present." "Yes sir," they both answered and took off. Page 134 He called Jacobie to him. "I want you to make sure none of the workers leave until the authorities arrive. I don't have the list of the temporary help here today. Only Herman and his personal security staff have access to that info.	El segundo cuerpo fue bajado después. Estaba cubierto de pies a cabeza con una sábana blanca. Keyerra caminaba lentamente detrás, llorando desconsoladamente. Jessica la sostenía con fuerza por la cintura. El corazón de JD se rompió al verla. Las dos mujeres subieron a la parte trasera de la segunda ambulancia junto con el cuerpo. Finalmente, Jacobie, Mike y su guardaespaldas bajaron por la escalera. —Así fue como salieron de la habitación —dijo mientras se acercaba a su hijo. Mike, exoficial de inteligencia del ejército, activó todo su entrenamiento mientras organizaba rápidamente a la multitud. Se subió a una mesa baja para que su voz se escuchara. —¡Todos los invitados, necesito que se muevan a este lado de la sala! —señaló—. ¡Todos los que están trabajando hoy, siéntense en esta área! Accedió a la lista de invitados publicada a la prensa esa semana en su WPC y le indicó a JD y a Jace que hicieran lo mismo. —Revisen a todos los invitados. Necesito los nombres de los que no están presentes. —Sí, señor —respondieron ambos antes de salir rápidamente. Página 134 Llamó a Jacobie. —Quiero que te asegures de que ninguno de los trabajadores se vaya hasta que lleguen las autoridades. No tengo la lista del personal temporal de hoy.
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Tell the police they need to talk to Kofi, the chief of security for the estate. I need to get to the hospital.” He looked to his bodyguard again. “Tunde, stay with me and be ready for anything.” Mike rushed to the hospital. Herman was still in surgery. He was directed to intensive care, where the patient would be taken after the procedure. As soon as he stepped onto the floor, he saw Jessica, and she ran into his arms. “How is he?” he asked as he hugged her tightly. “No word yet. Who would have done something like this? Herman was truly beloved in this city and around the New Union.” Mike pulled her over to the side where no one could overhear. “I suspect that the American government is behind this mess. Whitehorse intercepted chatter that they were planning something big in the New Union today. You remember Benson is determined to ruin us?” “Yes, I do, but why now?” Jessica asked. “That’s the billion-dollar question,” Mike stated. Before they could continue, the surgeon came through the double doors. He walked over to the Prime Minister, his head hanging low. “Sir, I am sorry to inform you... We lost Mr. Herman.”	Solo Herman y su equipo de seguridad personal tienen acceso a esa información. Diles a la policía que necesitan hablar con Kofi, el jefe de seguridad de la propiedad. Yo tengo que ir al hospital. Luego miró a su guardaespaldas. —Tunde, quédate conmigo y prepárate para cualquier cosa. Mike se apresuró al hospital. Herman aún estaba en cirugía. Lo dirigieron a cuidados intensivos, donde llevarían al paciente después del procedimiento. En cuanto llegó al piso, vio a Jessica, quien corrió hacia sus brazos. —¿Cómo está? —preguntó él, abrazándola con fuerza. —Aún no hay noticias. ¿Quién haría algo así? Herman era muy querido en esta ciudad y en toda la Nueva Unión. Mike la llevó a un lado, donde nadie pudiera oírlos. —Sospecho que el gobierno estadounidense está detrás de todo esto. Whitehorse interceptó comunicaciones de que estaban planeando algo grande en la Nueva Unión hoy. ¿Recuerdas que Benson está decidido a arruinarnos? —Sí, lo recuerdo, pero ¿por qué ahora? —preguntó Jessica. —Esa es la pregunta del millón —respondió Mike. Antes de que pudieran continuar, el cirujano salió por las puertas dobles. Caminó hacia el Primer Ministro con la cabeza baja. —Señor, lamento informarle... perdimos al señor Herman.
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Jessica fell into Mike's chest and wailed. He could only hold her as he began to shed tears. The doctor continued, looking down at the floor and shaking his head. "There was nothing we could do. The bullet was a direct hit to his heart, causing a myocardial rupture. He died on the operating table."	Jessica se desplomó contra el pecho de Mike y rompió en llanto. Él solo pudo sostenerla mientras las lágrimas comenzaban a correr por su rostro. El médico continuó, mirando al suelo y negando con la cabeza. —No había nada que pudiéramos hacer. La bala impactó directamente en su corazón, causando una ruptura miocárdica. Murió en la mesa de operaciones.
Page 135	Pagina 135
JD, Jace, and Jacobie flew together from the estate to the hospital. JD was behind the controls. "Has anyone seen Obi?" he asked as they approached the hospital. "No," they both answered in unison. "When the lights went out, he was shaking hands with the General. But when they came back on, he was nowhere to be seen," JD said.	JD, Jace y Jacobie volaron juntos desde la propiedad hasta el hospital. JD iba a los controles. —¿Alguien ha visto a Obi? —preguntó mientras se acercaban al hospital. —No —respondieron ambos al unísono. —Cuando se apagaron las luces, estaba dándole la mano a la General. Pero cuando volvieron, ya no estaba —dijo JD.
"So, what are you saying? You think he might be involved?" Jacobie asked from the back seat. "All I'm asking is... where is he?"	—Entonces, ¿qué estás diciendo? ¿Crees que podría estar involucrado? —preguntó Jacobie desde el asiento trasero. —Solo estoy preguntando... ¿dónde está?
"There were so many people. We may have just missed him. I'm sure he is already here with Keyerra," Jace said hopefully. Everyone was silent for the rest of the ride.	—Había mucha gente. Tal vez simplemente no lo vimos. Estoy seguro de que ya está aquí con Keyerra —dijo Jace con esperanza. El resto del trayecto transcurrió en silencio.
Avery rushed through the hospital emergency room doors. Keyerra was sitting in a corner with Jace next to her.	Avery irrumpió por las puertas de emergencias del hospital. Keyerra estaba sentada en una esquina con Jace a su lado.

Her head was bowed, her hands covering her face, and her shoulders shook as she cried. A reporter was talking on the vid wall as photos of Roxy and Herman filled the screen. Avery hurried over to her. “Baby girl, are you okay? What happened?” He pulled her into his arms. She sobbed into his ear. “Somebody killed Momma Roxy... Somebody killed Momma Roxy,” she kept repeating. Avery held onto her as tightly as he could and began to weep. A message from Mike appeared. <i>“Where are you? Are you okay? You need to get to the hospital ASAP!”</i> He sent back, <i>“Keyerra messaged me. I just got here. I’m in the emergency waiting room with her now. What the hell happened tonight, Mike?”</i> Page 136 Mike responded, <i>“I think I know who is behind this. Mussa and Jelena just got here. I will talk to you later.</i> Mussa never went to parties, so he and Jelena had been home. The couple walked over to Mike. “I heard about the shooting on the news. How is Herman doing?” Mussa asked, looking around, expecting to see his friend and mentor lying in a nearby bed. Mike spoke in a tearful voice. “I am sorry, Mussa, but we lost Herman and Roxy tonight.”	Tenía la cabeza inclinada, las manos cubriéndole el rostro y los hombros temblando mientras lloraba. Un reportero hablaba en la pantalla mientras fotos de Roxy y Herman llenaban la imagen. Avery corrió hacia ella. —Cariño, ¿estás bien? ¿Qué pasó? La abrazó con fuerza. Ella sollozó junto a su oído: —Alguien mató a mamá Roxy... alguien mató a mamá Roxy... Lo repetía una y otra vez. Avery la sostuvo con todas sus fuerzas y comenzó a llorar. Un mensaje de Mike apareció: <i>¿Dónde estás? ¿Estás bien? ¡Tienes que llegar al hospital lo antes posible!</i> Él respondió: <i>Keyerra me escribió. Acabo de llegar. Estoy en la sala de espera de emergencias con ella. ¿Qué demonios pasó esta noche, Mike?</i> Página 136 Mike contestó: <i>Creo que sé quién está detrás de esto. Mussa y Jelena acaban de llegar. Hablamos luego.</i> Mussa nunca iba a fiestas, así que él y Jelena estaban en casa. La pareja se acercó a Mike. —Escuché sobre el tiroteo en las noticias. ¿Cómo está Herman? —preguntó Mussa, mirando alrededor, esperando ver a su amigo y mentor en una cama cercana. Mike habló con la voz quebrada: —Lo siento, Mussa... pero esta noche perdimos a Herman y a Roxy.
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Mussa stumbled back, and Mike hurried to guide him down into a seat. “Oh God...oh God...why would any...” He managed to say before he broke down, crying loud and ugly. Jelena, who had been in stunned silence, rushed to his side and held him tightly, while they both cried. Page 137 Chapter 19 The next day, Mike met with all New Union leaders and the BG. board members, who were still in town after attending the party. Keyerra insisted on coming. “Whoever killed Momma Roxy, I want to help catch the MF, and ain’t nobody gon’ stop me,” she told Avery that morning as he prepared to leave without her. She was also worried about Obi. He’d been talking with Momma Roxy when the lights went out. He must have seen the shooter and went after them. She tried to contact him all last night. He might be lying dead or wounded somewhere. Avery had been ready to say no to her, but Keyerra stood defiant and angry like him. “Ok, hurry and get your things, we leave in ten minutes.”	Mussa dio un paso atrás tambaleándose, y Mike se apresuró a ayudarlo a sentarse. —Oh Dios... oh Dios... ¿por qué alguien...? No pudo terminar la frase antes de romper a llorar desconsoladamente. Jelena, que había permanecido en silencio por la conmoción, corrió a su lado y lo abrazó con fuerza mientras ambos lloraban. Pagina 137 Capítulo 19 Al día siguiente, Mike se reunió con todos los líderes de la Nueva Unión y los miembros de la junta directiva de BG. quienes aún estaban en la ciudad después de asistir a la fiesta. Keyerra insistió en ir. —Quien haya matado a mamá Roxy, quiero ayudar a atrapar a ese maldito, y nadie me va a detener. le dijo a Avery esa mañana, mientras él se preparaba para salir sin ella. También estaba preocupada por Obi. Había estado hablando con mamá Roxy cuando se apagaron las luces. Debía haber visto al tirador y haber ido tras él. Intentó contactarlo toda la noche. Podría estar muerto o herido en algún lugar. Avery estaba a punto de decirle que no, pero Keyerra se mantuvo firme y furiosa, igual que él. —Está bien, apúrate y recoge tus cosas. Nos vamos en diez minutos.
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Everyone gathered in the BG Inc. conference room, as Mike addressed the somber gathering of people and images.

“First, I want to thank everyone for being here this morning. Right now, I know we all have very heavy hearts. We have lost two very special and important people, personally and professionally. So, I have asked Bishop Jason to come and pray for us and the spirits of Herman and Roxy before we start.”

After Jason finished praying, Mike stood and looked around the room. “We have the footage of those who left the building during the blackout. We think these are the killers.” He touched a control, and the footage from news bot-7, which was stationed in the lobby, began. From the stairwell door on the south side, three people emerged into the room just before the emergency lights kicked in, still wearing their night vision eyewear.

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First, an overweight man dressed as a security guard, then a female in a formal dress, and finally, a tall, slender young man in a military uniform walked quickly across the room toward the front door. Keyerra jumped up from her seat and pointed. “Oh my God, that’s Obi!”

Todos se reunieron en la sala de conferencias de BG Inc., mientras Mike se dirigía al grupo de personas —y proyecciones— con semblante sombrío.

—Primero, quiero agradecerles a todos por estar aquí esta mañana. Sé que todos tenemos el corazón muy pesado. Hemos perdido a dos personas muy especiales e importantes, tanto en lo personal como en lo profesional. Por eso le he pedido al obispo Jason que venga a orar por nosotros y por las almas de Herman y Roxy antes de comenzar.

Después de que Jason terminó de orar, Mike se puso de pie y miró alrededor de la sala.

—Tenemos las grabaciones de quienes salieron del edificio durante el apagón. Creemos que ellos son los asesinos. Tocó un control, y comenzó la grabación del bot de noticias número 7, ubicado en el vestíbulo. Desde la puerta de la escalera del lado sur, tres personas emergieron justo antes de que se encendieran las luces de emergencia, aún usando visores de visión nocturna.

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Primero, un hombre con sobrepeso vestido como guardia de seguridad; luego, una mujer con un vestido formal; y finalmente, un joven alto y delgado con uniforme militar cruzaron rápidamente la sala hacia la puerta principal.

Keyerra se levantó de un salto y señaló. —¡Dios mío, ese es Obi!

The vid continued, and a different view from outside the building showed the three entering a black air car. There were no tags on it, as the car flew out of range of the camera. Mike touched his wristband, and three headshots appeared.	El video continuó, y otra toma desde el exterior mostró a los tres entrando en un auto aéreo negro. No tenía placas, y desapareció del alcance de la cámara. Mike tocó su pulsera, y aparecieron tres fotos de rostro.
This time, it was Avery's turn to jump to his feet. "Goddammit, that's Frank Mathis!" Mike froze the image and said, "Yes, it is." My security team identified the female as Sarr Afia. Everyone in the room knew that she was this year's plaything for Herman. Finally, the third person is Corporal Oliver Bautista. He is a member of the Minute Men Army.	Esta vez, Avery fue quien se levantó de golpe. —¡Maldita sea, ese es Frank Mathis! Mike congeló la imagen. —Sí, lo es. Mi equipo de seguridad identificó a la mujer como Sarr Afia. Todos aquí saben que era la compañera de Herman este año. Y finalmente, la tercera persona es el cabo Oliver Bautista, miembro del Ejército de los Minute Men.
"As I suspected, they worked as agents for the American government. I have also been informed that the backup control board for the SDS was also stolen. Herman kept it in his office safe. This means Benson may be able to control the SDS, and why the attacks are happening now. If he can control the weapon, then we would be defenseless."	—Como sospechaba, trabajaban como agentes del gobierno estadounidense. También me han informado que la placa de control de respaldo del SDS fue robada. Herman la guardaba en la caja fuerte de su oficina. Esto significa que Benson podría ser capaz de controlar el SDS, y esa es la razón por la que los ataques están ocurriendo ahora. Si logra controlar el arma, quedaríamos indefensos.
Mussa stood shaking his head. "They may have the motherboard, but that doesn't mean they know how to operate it. Only a handful of people in the world know how it works." Mussa continued to explain.	Mussa negó con la cabeza. —Puede que tengan la placa base, pero eso no significa que sepan cómo usarla. Solo un puñado de personas en el mundo entiende cómo funciona. Continuó explicando:
"The motherboard must be connected to the weapon itself. And these connection points are located in secure secret military installations around the New Union."	—La placa base debe conectarse al arma en sí. Y esos puntos de conexión están ubicados en instalaciones militares secretas y seguras por toda la Nueva Unión.

“Who are those people?” Mike asked. “Herman, of course, me and the seven Army Captains we trained.” Mike quickly messaged his security team. <i>Put personal guards on the SDS Captains, and add another full guard detail at the facility where they work ASAP.</i> Out loud, he said, “The New Page 139 Union will go to threat level four starting today.” He looked at the New Union governors. “Have your people ready. Expect an attack of some type at any time.” He looked to Mussa. “You will also need a personal guard. I will have someone for you when you leave here today.” “What about the people who did this?” Keyerra wanted to know with tears pooling in her eyes. “We think they may have already left the country. But we have issued alerts for every citizen to be on the lookout. Every news agency, airport, and metro station has been sent their photos and info. If they are anywhere in the New Union, we will find them.” Avery put his arm around his daughter’s shoulder and pulled her to him, and then they both slowly sat down.	—¿Quiénes son esas personas? — preguntó Mike. —Herman, por supuesto, yo y los siete capitanes del ejército que entrenamos. Mike envió rápidamente un mensaje a su equipo de seguridad: <i>Asignen guardias personales a los capitanes del SDS y agreguen un refuerzo completo de seguridad en la instalación donde trabajan, de inmediato.</i> Luego dijo en voz alta: —La Nueva Página 139 Unión pasará al nivel de amenaza cuatro a partir de hoy. Miró a los gobernadores. —Tengan a su gente preparada. Esperen un ataque en cualquier momento. Luego miró a Mussa. —También necesitarás seguridad personal. Te asignaré a alguien antes de que salgas de aquí. —¿Y las personas que hicieron esto? —preguntó Keyerra, con lágrimas acumulándose en sus ojos. —Creemos que ya pudieron haber salido del país. Pero hemos emitido alertas para que todos los ciudadanos estén atentos. Todas las agencias de noticias, aeropuertos y estaciones de metro tienen sus fotos e información. Si están en algún lugar de la Nueva Unión, los encontraremos. Avery rodeó los hombros de su hija con el brazo y la atrajo hacia él. Luego ambos se sentaron lentamente.
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Mike turned to Sahar. "I have a special mission I want you to perform. I will speak to you in private with the details." "Yes sir, anything BG Inc. can do, we will. Mr. Herman came up with the concept of the Beale Group. Without him, there would be no me," she said as her eyes watered. Next, he turned his attention to his son. "I know you want to fly, but just for a little while, I need you in the lab. Herman, Mussa, and Ban were working on a "new project." Without Herman, they will need your help." JD looked confused at first, but his dad sent him a message. <i>"Please trust me on this, Mussa will explain everything."</i> "Yes sir, I understand," JD said out loud. Finally, Mike turned back to the images of the NU leaders. "During this alert level, we will meet each morning to go over protocols, emergency procedures, and any information updates. One of our first goals is to control the narrative of the news vids reports. No one is to Page 140 know about the motherboard being stolen. Is that understood?" They all responded in the affirmative. <i>"In that case, this meeting is adjourned."</i>	Mike se dirigió a Sahar. —Tengo una misión especial que quiero que realices. Hablaré contigo en privado para darte los detalles. —Sí, señor. Lo que BG Inc. pueda hacer, lo haremos. El señor Herman fue quien ideó el concepto del Grupo Beale. Sin él, yo no existiría —dijo, con los ojos llenos de lágrimas. Luego miró a su hijo. —Sé que quieres volar, pero por un tiempo necesito que estés en el laboratorio. Herman, Mussa y Ban estaban trabajando en un "nuevo proyecto". Sin Herman, necesitarán tu ayuda. JD se mostró confundido al principio, pero su padre le envió un mensaje: <i>Confía en mí. Mussa te explicará todo.</i> —Sí, señor, entiendo —respondió JD en voz alta. Finalmente, Mike volvió a dirigirse a las imágenes holográficas de los líderes de la Nueva Unión. —Durante este nivel de alerta, nos reuniremos cada mañana para revisar protocolos, procedimientos de emergencia y cualquier actualización de información. Uno de nuestros principales objetivos es controlar la narrativa de los reportes de noticias. Nadie debe Página 140 saber que la placa base fue robada. ¿Está claro? Todos respondieron afirmativamente. —En ese caso, se levanta la sesión.
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Avery and Keyerra were flying home in silence. He finally asked, “Is that the young man you were anxious for us to meet?” “Yes, I can’t believe he would do something like this. We were in love and planned on moving in together,” she whispered with her head hung low. “How long have you been seeing him?” “Since last May, a few months before we came here.” She looked up at him, and tears fell from her lovely eyes. “This is my fault, and I’m so sorry, Dad. I’m the one who got Momma Roxy killed. I should have known... I am so sorry.” Avery’s heart hurt for her. He reached over and put his hand on her knee. “Please, there is nothing for you to be sorry about. You never pulled a trigger or made a plan. This is not your fault. Baby girl, hold your head up. All you did was put your trust in the wrong person. Nobody can fault you for being in love. Now, if anyone is to blame, it’s me.” She sniffed. “Please don’t try to placate me, you have done nothing but help people your whole life.” “Baby girl, I have done plenty wrong at this stage. That man, Frank Mathis, has a personal vendetta against me. He openly pledged to kill me, so I’m sure I was his target. The only thing that saved me last night was my absence.	Avery y Keyerra volaban de regreso a casa en silencio. Finalmente, él preguntó: —¿Ese es el joven que estabas ansiosa por que conociéramos? —Sí, no puedo creer que haya hecho algo así. Estábamos enamorados y planeábamos mudarnos juntos —susurró ella con la cabeza baja. —¿Cuánto tiempo llevabas viéndolo? —Desde mayo pasado, unos meses antes de venir aquí. —Levantó la mirada hacia él, y las lágrimas comenzaron a caer de sus hermosos ojos—. Esto es mi culpa, y lo siento mucho, papá. Yo fui quien hizo que mataran a mamá Roxy. Debí haberlo sabido... lo siento tanto. El corazón de Avery se encogió por ella. Se inclinó y puso su mano sobre su rodilla. —Por favor, no tienes nada de qué disculparte. Tú no apretaste un gatillo ni hiciste ningún plan. Esto no es tu culpa. Niña, levanta la cabeza. Lo único que hiciste fue confiar en la persona equivocada. Nadie puede culparte por estar enamorada. Ahora, si alguien tiene la culpa, soy yo. Ella sorbió por la nariz. —Por favor, no intentes calmarme; no has hecho otra cosa que ayudar a la gente en toda tu vida. —Cariño, a estas alturas he hecho muchas cosas malas. Ese hombre, Frank Mathis, tiene una vendetta personal conmigo. Juró abiertamente que me mataría, así que estoy seguro de que yo era su objetivo. Lo único que me salvó anoche fue mi ausencia.
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I went to an unexpected meeting. Someone had important information for Roxy. I told her to go to the party with you, and I would meet the man and see y'all later at Herman's." She looked up at him. "Why does he want to kill you so bad?"	Fui a una reunión inesperada; alguien tenía información importante para Roxy. Le dije que fuera a la fiesta contigo, que yo me reuniría con ese hombre y que nos veríamos más tarde en lo de Herman. Ella levantó la vista hacia él. —¿Por qué tiene tantas ganas de matarte?
Page 141 "It's a long story, but the short version is, I killed his father when we both were still nothing but boys. His dad and my mother were together, high on drugs. Mom passed out. His father decided he wanted to have sex with my twelve-year-old sister. I was fourteen at the time. I got home that night in time to see him trying to rape her." "I ran and got my mom's old 22 and shot him. He was too high to get up and get help. He bled out. Mom found his body the next day when she finally woke up. The police took her into custody, and she took the blame. My mom was why I accomplished everything you wrote about in your book." They fell silent again, and after a while, Keyerra said, "If I ever see Obi again, I will kill him myself."	Página 141 —Es una larga historia, pero la versión corta es que maté a su padre cuando ambos no éramos más que unos niños. Su padre y mi madre estaban juntos, drogados. Mamá se desmayó. Su padre decidió que quería tener relaciones con mi hermana de doce años. Yo tenía catorce en ese entonces. Llegué a casa esa noche a tiempo para ver cómo intentaba violarla. »Corrí a buscar la vieja .22 de mi madre y le disparé. Estaba demasiado drogado para levantarse y pedir ayuda. Se desangró. Mamá encontró el cuerpo al día siguiente, cuando por fin despertó. La policía se la llevó detenida y ella cargó con la culpa. Mi madre fue la razón por la que logré todo lo que escribiste en tu libro. Se sumieron de nuevo en el silencio y, después de un rato, Keyerra dijo: —Si alguna vez vuelvo a ver a Obi, lo mataré yo misma.
Page 142 Chapter 20 JD reported to the lab. He felt a deep sadness as he walked through the lobby area and headed toward the elevators. He was used to hearing	Página 142 Capítulo 20 JD se presentó en el laboratorio. Sentía una profunda tristeza mientras cruzaba el vestíbulo y se dirigía hacia los ascensores. Estaba acostumbrado a

Uncle Herman's gruff voice greeting him as he approached the doors.	escuchar la voz áspera del tío Herman saludándolo cuando se acercaba a las puertas.
But instead, Mr. Kofi greeted him. "Hello, JD. Please, place your hand on the scanner." He placed his right hand on it. The light turned green, and the doors opened. "Welcome back, Fly Guy. Please proceed to the lab."	Pero en su lugar, el señor Kofi lo recibió. —Hola, JD. Por favor, coloca tu mano en el escáner. Él puso su mano derecha. La luz se volvió verde y las puertas se abrieron. —Bienvenido de nuevo, chico volador. Por favor, dirígete al laboratorio.
JD smiled for the first time that morning and stepped into the elevator. "Oh, so now you got jokes. Has Uncle Mussa arrived?" "Yes, and Miss Ban is here also." "Have they been alerted I'm on my way up?"	JD sonrió por primera vez esa mañana y entró al ascensor. —Ah, ¿así que ahora haces chistes? ¿El tío Mussa ya llegó? —Sí, y la señorita Ban también está aquí. —¿Les avisaron que voy en camino?
"Yes, they are expecting you. There is a personal guard for Dr. Dallio outside the door. He is also aware you are on your way up."	—Sí, lo están esperando. Hay un guardia personal del doctor Dallio afuera de la puerta. También está al tanto de que vienes.
The doors opened, and a guard sat outside the lab's entrance. JD acknowledged the man as he stepped past him and into the vast billion-dollar facility. He greeted Mussa with a long hug.	Las puertas se abrieron y un guardia estaba sentado afuera de la entrada del laboratorio. JD lo saludó al pasar y entró en la enorme instalación de miles de millones de dólares. Saludó a Mussa con un largo abrazo.
Both men held on tightly. Herman had meant so much to both of them.	Ambos hombres se aferraron con fuerza. Herman había significado mucho para los dos.
—"What are we going to do without him? I miss him so much already," JD mumbled in his ear. Mussa stepped back and gave him a stern look. "You know what he would say to you right now, don't you?"	—¿Qué vamos a hacer sin él? Ya lo extraño tanto —murmuró JD en su oído. Mussa se apartó y lo miró con seriedad. —Sabes lo que él te diría ahora mismo, ¿verdad?
JD smiled as tears stood in his eyes. "Yes, I do."	JD sonrió con lágrimas en los ojos. —Sí, lo sé.

In his grumpy and lovable way, he would say, <i>'Boy, what's your feelings got to do with solving this problem? Now, get to work!'</i> Page 143 They both wiped at their eyes to keep tears from falling. JD noticed Ban sitting at a far table. He walked over to her, held out his hand to shake hers, and said, "We have not been formally introduced, though we have met a couple of times. I am JD Williams, and it's finally nice to have a chance to meet and talk with you again." He looked back to Mussa with a curious expression and continued. "And I'm excited to work with you also." She answered in his mind while slowly looking him up and down and taking his hand. <i>Believe me, the pleasure is all mine.</i> JD jumped back quickly and looked around, then back at her. "Did you just...I mean, how did you do that?" Mussa smiled and said, "That's just the first surprise. Come over here and have a seat," he beckoned to Ban. "You come too, so we can brief him." They walked over to the table, and she sat across from JD. "I will start at the beginning. Ban is an ancestor of the historical personality we know as Jesus from the Bible. We have evidence that Jesus did indeed come from another planet. Among his abilities was the power to communicate using telepathy. Ban seems to have inherited that trait."	A su manera gruñona y entrañable, diría: "Muchacho, ¿qué tienen que ver tus sentimientos con resolver este problema? ¡Ahora, ponte a trabajar!" Páginas 143 Ambos se limpiaron los ojos para evitar que las lágrimas cayeran. JD notó a Ban sentada en una mesa al fondo. Caminó hacia ella, extendió la mano para saludarla y dijo: —No hemos sido presentados formalmente, aunque nos hemos visto un par de veces. Soy JD Williams, y por fin es un gusto poder conocerte y hablar contigo de nuevo. Miró a Mussa con curiosidad y continuó: —Y también estoy entusiasmado por trabajar contigo. Ella le respondió en su mente mientras lo observaba de arriba abajo y estrechaba su mano. <i>Créeme, el placer es todo mío.</i> JD se apartó rápidamente y miró a su alrededor, luego volvió a verla. —¿Acabas de...? Quiero decir, ¿cómo hiciste eso? Mussa sonrió. —Esa es solo la primera sorpresa. Ven, siéntate aquí —le indicó a Ban—. Tú también, así podemos ponerlo al tanto. Caminaron hacia la mesa, y ella se sentó frente a JD. —Empezaré desde el principio. Ban es descendiente de la figura histórica que conocemos como Jesús en la Biblia. Tenemos evidencia de que Jesús en realidad provenía de otro planeta. Entre sus habilidades estaba el poder de comunicarse mediante telepatía.
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"I can also speak normally, of course. But I prefer this form of communication. It's faster and more efficient, kinda like the difference between having a neuro-computer versus a WPC.	Parece que Ban ha heredado ese rasgo. —También puedo hablar normalmente, por supuesto. Pero prefiero esta forma de comunicación. Es más rápida y eficiente, algo así como la diferencia entre tener una neurocomputadora y una PC común.
JD sat back, his mouth still hanging open. Finally, he stammered, "So... are you telling me you are an alien?"	JD se recostó en la silla, con la boca aún entreabierta. Finalmente, balbuceó: —Entonces... ¿me estás diciendo que eres un extraterrestre?
"I do know that I am part Terlerian and part human. I was born on Earth, and I have never been to my ancestors' planet," she said to him with an amused look in her pretty, gray eyes.	—Sé que soy en parte terleriana y en parte humana. Nací en la Tierra y nunca he estado en el planeta de mis ancestros —le dijo con una expresión divertida en sus bonitos ojos grises.
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"What other abilities do you have? Can you heal or walk on water?" Suddenly, he sat back and smiled. His mind was at ease, and he wasn't anxious, nervous, or sad anymore.	—¿Qué otras habilidades tienes? ¿Puedes sanar o caminar sobre el agua? De repente, se recostó y sonrió. Su mente estaba en calma; ya no se sentía ansioso, nervioso ni triste.
He thought to himself, <i>I know this is not right, so why do I feel like everything is ok?</i>	Pensó para sí mismo: <i>Sé que esto no está bien... entonces, ¿por qué siento que todo está bien?</i>
<i>That's because I am making you feel at ease. I can also control emotions.</i> She spoke this into his and Mussa's minds simultaneously.	Eso es porque te estoy haciendo sentir en confianza. También puedo controlar las emociones. Ella dijo esto en la mente de él y de Mussa simultáneamente.
JD's emotions were back to normal in the blink of an eye. "Wow! I knew you were different, but this...this is a whole other level of difference."	Las emociones de JD volvieron a la normalidad en un abrir y cerrar de ojos. "¡Wow! Sabía que eras diferente, pero esto... esto es otro nivel de diferencia."
Mussa touched a button, and an image of the book of Q appeared.	Mussa tocó un botón y apareció una imagen del libro de Q.

"That's the Q Continuum. Uncle Jason has been searching for it since his college days," JD said as he interrupted Mussa before he could say anything further. "Well, he found it, and that's how he found Ban and her family. I have just downloaded the file to you. But for now, I want you to read these first two pages from the book's last chapter to prepare you for the next surprise and why we need you in the lab." The pages hung at eye level, and he read them. Again, he sat back with his mouth hanging open. And he stammered again, "You mean to tell me we have a spaceship from another planet?" "Yes," they both said. "Can I see it?" "Follow me." Mussa's smile was as wide as JD's. They all got up and walked to the elevators. Mussa put his hand on the scanner, and the doors opened. "Hello, Dr. Dallio. Which floor should I direct you to?" "Take us to the basement sublevel three; thank you, Kofi." "Yes sir." Page 145 JD had been to the basement level before, but never to the third level. It took what seemed like minutes before they stopped, and the doors opened. Mussa spoke, and the lights became brighter. JD looked around and saw a large covered object sitting in the back area of the enormous room.	"Ese es el Continuo Q. El tío Jason lo ha estado buscando desde sus días en la universidad," dijo JD, interrumpiendo a Mussa antes de que pudiera decir algo más. "Bueno, lo encontré, y así fue como encontré a Ban y a su familia. Acabo de descargar el archivo en ti. Pero por ahora, quiero que leas estas dos primeras páginas del último capítulo del libro para prepararte para la siguiente sorpresa y por qué te necesitamos en el laboratorio." Las páginas quedaron suspendidas a la altura de sus ojos, y él las leyó. De nuevo, se echó hacia atrás con la boca abierta. Y tartamudeó otra vez: "¿Me están diciendo que tenemos una nave espacial de otro planeta?" "Sí," dijeron ambos. "¿Puedo verla?" "Sígueme." La sonrisa de Mussa era tan amplia como la de JD. Todos se levantaron y caminaron hacia los ascensores. Mussa puso su mano en el escáner y las puertas se abrieron. "Hola, Dr. Dallio. ¿A qué piso debo dirigirlos?" "Llévanos al tercer subnivel del sótano; gracias, Kofi." "Sí, señor." Página 145 JD ya había estado antes en el nivel del sótano, pero nunca en el tercer nivel. Pasaron lo que parecieron minutos antes de detenerse, y las puertas se abrieron. Mussa habló, y las luces se hicieron más brillantes. JD miró alrededor y vio un gran objeto cubierto colocado en la parte trasera de la enorme sala.
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Mussa began walking toward it. "Let's take a closer look, shall we?" The trio walked over to the covered object. Mussa walked to a control panel mounted on a podium stand to the ship's right. He touched a button, and the gray silk material lifted and slid aside to reveal the ship. "Wow! Wow!" It was all JD could manage as he walked up to the ship. It was flat on its underside, with no apparent wheels or landing gears. The color was a dull gray-black. It would have been hard to detect if it appeared in the night sky. He'd expected it to be round like the ones he saw in movie vids. But this one had the appearance of an old-school jet. What appeared to be wings were out to the side in an aerodynamic configuration. He could see no windows or a way to get inside. There were no lines or breaks on the surface. It looked like it was made in one piece, not in sections. As he slowly walked around the ship, he talked to Mussa and Ban. "It looks to be about seven and a half meters long and at least six meters tall." "That's pretty good, JD; it's 7.3 meters long and exactly 6.5 meters tall." "How did y'all get it here? Does it fly?" JD reached out and touched the smooth, dark surface. "It's cool to the touch. What kind of metal is this?" He kept walking around the ship. "Can we go inside?"	Mussa comenzó a caminar hacia él. "Echemos un vistazo más de cerca, ¿les parece?" Los tres caminaron hacia el objeto cubierto. Mussa se dirigió a un panel de control montado en un pedestal a la derecha de la nave. Tocó un botón, y la tela de seda gris se levantó y se deslizó a un lado para revelar la nave. "¡Wow! ¡Wow!" Era todo lo que JD podía decir mientras se acercaba a la nave. Era plana en su parte inferior, sin ruedas ni tren de aterrizaje aparentes. El color era un gris oscuro opaco. Habría sido difícil detectarla si apareciera en el cielo nocturno. Él esperaba que fuera redonda, como las que veía en los videos de películas. Pero esta tenía la apariencia de un jet de la vieja escuela. Lo que parecían alas se extendían hacia los lados en una configuración aerodinámica. No podía ver ventanas ni una forma de entrar. No había líneas ni uniones en la superficie. Parecía estar hecha de una sola pieza, no en secciones. Mientras caminaba lentamente alrededor de la nave, habló con Mussa y Ban: "Parece medir unos siete metros y medio de largo y al menos seis metros de alto." "Eso está bastante bien, JD; mide 7.3 metros de largo y exactamente 6.5 metros de alto." "¿Cómo la trajeron aquí? ¿Vuela?" JD extendió la mano y tocó la superficie lisa y oscura. "Está fría al tacto. ¿Qué tipo de metal es este?" Continuó caminando alrededor de la nave. "¿Podemos entrar?"
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"I thought you'd never ask," said Mussa and proceeded to touch another button on the panel. An entryway appeared in front of the wing on the right side.

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Mussa and Ban walked into the aircraft. "Wow!" JD exclaimed again, following them inside. "It's very spacious, unlike it appears on the outside." He found his six-foot frame fit easily without him having to bend over. Inside the cabin, there were five seats. Four appeared to be a station with separate monitors and a touchscreen control board.

Ban walked over to the biggest station, flicked on the control, and the panel lit up.

"That's good, Ban. Now let's sit down," Mussa told them.

JD thought the station where Ban was sitting must be the captain's seat because it had the most gizmos.

JD took the seat next to her. He knew it was the pilot's position because he could see the joystick. It was spaced about three feet below Ban's chair. Mussa sat in the chair on the left side, behind the two of them at what he thought might be communications.

Once everyone was settled, Mussa continued. "The ancestor left behind instructions written in his home language. He also left a scroll to help unlock or translate the information. Ban is still learning how to use it. That's one of the reasons we needed you to work with her to help figure out the directives."

"Pensé que nunca lo preguntaría," dijo Mussa, y procedió a tocar otro botón en el panel. Apareció una entrada frente al ala del lado derecho.

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Mussa y Ban entraron en la aeronave. "¡Wow!" exclamó JD otra vez, siguiéndolos al interior. "Es muy espaciosa, a diferencia de lo que parece por fuera." Notó que su estatura de seis pies cabía fácilmente sin tener que agacharse. Dentro de la cabina había cinco asientos. Cuatro parecían estaciones con monitores separados y un panel de control táctil.

Ban caminó hacia la estación más grande, activó el control, y el panel se iluminó.

"Eso está bien, Ban. Ahora sentémonos," les dijo Mussa.

JD pensó que la estación donde estaba sentada Ban debía ser el asiento del capitán porque tenía más dispositivos.

JD tomó el asiento a su lado. Sabía que era la posición del piloto porque podía ver el joystick. Estaba ubicado aproximadamente a un metro por debajo de la silla de Ban. Mussa se sentó en la silla del lado izquierdo, detrás de ellos dos, en lo que él pensó que podría ser comunicaciones.

Una vez que todos estuvieron acomodados, Mussa continuó:

"El ancestro dejó instrucciones escritas en su idioma natal. También dejó un pergamino para ayudar a desbloquear o traducir la información. Ban todavía está aprendiendo a usarlo. Esa es una de las razones por las que te necesitamos para trabajar con ella y ayudar a descifrar las directivas."

“Ok, I will do my best. But how did y’all get it here in the first place?”	“Está bien, haré lo mejor que pueda. Pero ¿cómo la trajeron aquí en primer lugar?”
“Herman and your father arranged for it to be brought here under very tight security in a military cargo plane.” He pointed in the direction of the back wall. “There is a garage door large enough to allow the aircraft to enter.” Ban took over the discussion.	“Herman y tu padre hicieron los arreglos para traerla aquí bajo una seguridad muy estricta en un avión de carga militar.” Señaló hacia la pared del fondo. “Hay una puerta de garaje lo suficientemente grande como para permitir la entrada de la aeronave.” Ban tomó la palabra:
“So far, I can open the door and turn on the panels. I’m now at the stage of starting the engine. As far as I can ascertain, we will require four people to perform all the necessary functions. So, we will need three more Air Force pilots who can fly and we can trust to help us at this next stage.”	“Hasta ahora, puedo abrir la puerta y encender los paneles. Ahora estoy en la etapa de arrancar el motor. Por lo que puedo deducir, necesitaremos cuatro personas para realizar todas las funciones necesarias. Así que necesitaremos tres pilotos más de la Fuerza Aérea que sepan volar y en quienes podamos confiar para ayudarnos en esta siguiente etapa.”
“I think I know just the right people to ask. In the meantime, I will read your ancestor’s instructions and see if I can help with the translations.”	“Creo que conozco a las personas indicadas para pedirles ayuda. Mientras tanto, leeré las instrucciones de tu ancestro y veré si puedo ayudar con las traducciones.”
Mussa spoke. “So far, only Ban has been slowly able to use the key. Herman tried to help, but he just slowed her down.”	Mussa habló: “Hasta ahora, solo Ban ha podido usar lentamente la llave. Herman intentó ayudar, pero solo la retrasó.”
“Ban, can you send me the key? Maybe I can develop a faster system using my neuro processors.”	—Ban, ¿puedes enviarme la clave? Tal vez pueda desarrollar un sistema más rápido usando mis neuroprocesadores.
She smiled up at him. “That might work. Your internal processors are faster than the chamber computer I use.	Ella le sonrió. —Eso podría funcionar. Tus procesadores internos son más rápidos que la computadora de la cámara que uso.

I am sending it to you now. Any help I can get would be much appreciated.”	Te la estoy enviando ahora. Cualquier ayuda que pueda recibir será muy apreciada.
JD left the lab feeling better than he had the entire week. He returned to his barracks room, meditated, and messaged his best friends.	JD salió del laboratorio sintiéndose mejor que en toda la semana. Regresó a su habitación en los barracones, meditó y les envió un mensaje a sus mejores amigos:
<i>“You are not going to believe what I saw today! Our dreams are about to come true! Meet me in my room in twenty minutes. Before you come, read the first two pages of the download I just sent you.”</i>	<i>¡No van a creer lo que vi hoy! ¡Nuestros sueños están a punto de hacerse realidad! Reúnanse en mi habitación en veinte minutos. Antes de venir, lean las dos primeras páginas de la descarga que acabo de enviarles.</i>
They were in his room in five minutes. “JD, boyo, if this is a joke, then I am going to be annoyed. I was on the pull with this charming captain. I was just about to reel her in,” Jacobie said as he laid back on the bunk, hands behind his head.	Estaban en su habitación en cinco minutos. —JD, muchacho, si esto es una broma, me voy a molestar. Estaba coqueteando con una capitana encantadora. Estaba a punto de conquistarla —dijo Jacobie mientras se recostaba en la litera con las manos detrás de la cabeza.
“I hate to admit that I agree with Mr. Fisherman of the Year. But if you are kidding, I have other things I need to do.”	—Odio admitir que estoy de acuerdo con el “Pescador del Año”. Pero si estás bromeando, tengo otras cosas que hacer.
“I saw it with my own eyes. I even sat in the thing. I promise you on everything, this is real. My father, Uncle Mussa, Ban, the new kid, I told you about, and Uncle Jason are the only ones who know about the project.	—Lo vi con mis propios ojos. Incluso me senté en esa cosa. Se los juro por todo, esto es real. Mi padre, el tío Mussa, Ban —la chica nueva de la que les hablé— y el tío Jason son los únicos que conocen el proyecto.
They are going to need four people to fly the thing. Remember, that’s why we are in the Air Force. This is why we joined up, to one day fly into space. I think this was meant to be.”	Van a necesitar a cuatro personas para pilotarlo. Recuerden, por eso estamos en la Fuerza Aérea. Para esto nos alistamos: para algún día volar al espacio. Creo que esto estaba destinado a pasar.

Page 148 Jacobie sat up with a determined look. “If this is not a joke, then count me in.” “I’m in too,” Jace added. “Who else are you going to ask?” We will need one more person.” “I was thinking of asking Keyerra. She is intelligent, a quick study, and just as good a pilot as I am.” “Is that the only reason?” They both looked at him knowingly. “Look, she just lost the person who helped raise her. The man she fell in love with may be the guy who shot the woman. I have talked with Keyerra, and she blames herself for everything.” He shrugged his shoulders and said, “I just think this will help take her mind off the crazy stuff going on in her life. Maybe this will help get her back on track.” The next day, JD called Keyerra and asked if they could have lunch together. She agreed, provided they met at her home. “I’m still on leave and don’t want to be in the public eye right now. And wherever you go, bots are sure to follow.” She was right about that. Floating billboards everywhere in the New Union featured his image in uniform and the words “#FlyGuy, Join Me!” His father said it was good for recruitment and morale. But whenever he went out in public, news and gossip bots followed.	Página 148 Jacobie se incorporó con una mirada decidida. —Si esto no es una broma, cuenta conmigo. —Yo también me apunto —añadió Jace. —¿A quién más vas a invitar? Necesitaremos a una persona más. —Estaba pensando en Keyerra. Es inteligente, aprende rápido y es tan buena piloto como yo. —¿Esa es la única razón? —ambos lo miraron con complicidad. —Miren, ella acaba de perder a la persona que la crió. El hombre del que se enamoró puede ser quien le disparó a la mujer. He hablado con Keyerra, y se culpa por todo —se encogió de hombros—. Solo creo que esto podría ayudarla a distraerse de todo lo loco que está pasando en su vida. Tal vez esto la ayude a retomar el rumbo. Al día siguiente, JD llamó a Keyerra y le preguntó si podían almorzar juntos. Ella aceptó, con la condición de que se encontraran en su casa. —Sigo de licencia y no quiero estar en el ojo público ahora mismo. Y donde sea que vayas, los bots seguro te siguen. Tenía razón. Carteles flotantes por toda la Nueva Unión mostraban su imagen con uniforme y las palabras: “#FlyGuy, ¡Únete a mí!”. Su padre decía que era bueno para el reclutamiento y la moral. Pero cada vez que salía en público, bots de noticias y chismes lo seguían.
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They were squadmates, and they knew each other well.	Eran compañeros de escuadrón y se conocían bien.
“I made your favorite.” She set a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a bowl of tomato soup before him.	—Preparé tu comida favorita —dijo ella, colocando frente a él un emparedado de mantequilla de maní con mermelada y un tazón de sopa de tomate.
“Thanks, you remembered,” he said as he picked up the sandwich and took a big bite. “I want to talk to you about a new top-secret position that has opened up,” he said around a full mouth.	—Gracias, lo recordaste —respondió mientras tomaba el sándwich y le daba un gran mordisco—. Quiero hablar contigo sobre un nuevo puesto ultrasecreto que se ha abierto —dijo con la boca llena.
“I am sorry you came all this way. But I am thinking of resigning and leaving the military.”	—Lamento que hayas venido hasta aquí, pero estoy pensando en renunciar y dejar el ejército.
Page 149 JD dropped the sandwich back on the plate. “Keyerra...Why? You are one of the best airmen I know. Why would you quit?”	Página 149 JD dejó caer el sándwich en el plato. —Keyerra... ¿por qué? Eres una de las mejores aviadoras que conozco. ¿Por qué querías renunciar?
She looked at him for a long time, trying to decide. Finally, she said, “I am going to tell you something I have not told anyone except my dad.” JD instantly became concerned.	Ella lo miró durante un largo momento, como decidiendo. Finalmente dijo: —Voy a contarte algo que no le he dicho a nadie excepto a mi padre. JD se preocupó al instante.
She blurted out. “I am pregnant... And here in the New Union, I will not be allowed to keep the baby. I know this may sound crazy to you. But I cannot kill this life growing inside of me. I know the father may be a spy, and he may have murdered Momma Roxy. But this child is innocent. When I told my father, he tried to pull some strings. But in the end, if I want to keep this baby, I will have to leave the New Union.”	Ella soltó de golpe: —Estoy embarazada... Y aquí, en la Nueva Unión, no me permitirán quedarme con el bebé. Sé que puede sonar loco para ti, pero no puedo acabar con esta vida que crece dentro de mí. Sé que el padre puede ser un espía y que pudo haber asesinado a Mamá Roxy. Pero este niño es inocente. Cuando se lo dije a mi padre, intentó mover influencias, pero al final, si quiero tener a este bebé, tendré que irme de la Nueva Unión.
They looked into each other’s eyes for a long time.	Se miraron a los ojos durante un largo rato.

JD said, “There may be one more string I can pull. Let me get back to you in a few days. Promise me you won’t do anything drastic until you hear from me.” She took a deep breath, looked at him for a long time, and said, “Ok, I promise.”	JD dijo: —Puede que haya un último favor que pueda pedir. Déjame hablar contigo en unos días. Prométeme que no harás nada drástico hasta que te diga algo. Ella respiró hondo, lo miró durante un momento y dijo: —Está bien, lo prometo.
When he returned to his room, he turned on the light outside his door. JD knew what he was about to do was wrong, but he couldn’t let her go. He was falling in love with her.	Cuando regresó a su habitación, encendió la luz fuera de su puerta. JD sabía que lo que estaba a punto de hacer estaba mal, pero no podía dejarla ir. Se estaba enamorando de ella.
He sat on his prayer rug and had a long talk with God.	Se sentó sobre su alfombra de oración y tuvo una larga conversación con Dios.
Page 150	Página 150
Chapter 21	Capítulo 21
JD messaged his parents and asked to have dinner with them the next night. He knew he would need moral support, so he asked his Uncle Jason if he would also join them.	JD envió un mensaje a sus padres y les pidió cenar con ellos la noche siguiente. Sabía que necesitaría apoyo moral, así que también le pidió a su tío Jason que los acompañara.
“Well, this is an unexpected pleasure,” Jessica said as JD and Jason entered his parents’ massive estate. She gave each a long, hard hug. “Your dad will be down in a minute. Chef Jabari has prepared something special for tonight.” She looked at Jason. “Thanks to your new daughter, I’m told.” JD smiled and said,	—Bueno, qué placer tan inesperado —dijo Jessica cuando JD y Jason entraron a la enorme propiedad de sus padres. Les dio a ambos un abrazo largo y fuerte—. Tu padre bajará en un momento. El chef Jabari ha preparado algo especial para esta noche. Miró a Jason. —Gracias a tu nueva hija, según me han dicho. JD sonrió.
“Yes, Ban is something! And I am impressed with her. Uncle Jason, I’m glad she is here.”	—Sí, ¡Ban es increíble! Y me ha impresionado mucho. Tío Jason, me alegra que esté aquí.
Mike came into the room. She noticed the father and son had the same worried expression. Jessica looked at both men and knew something was up.	Mike entró en la sala. Notó que padre e hijo tenían la misma expresión de preocupación. Jessica los miró a ambos y supo que algo pasaba.

But she also knew them both well enough to be patient, and they would eventually tell her everything. Right now, no one was saying anything. “Dinner is served at your leisure,” Chef Jabari announced from the dining area intercom. “Thank goodness,” Jessica said. “Y’all are just too quiet for me; maybe the rack of lamb chef prepared will get you guys talking.” “What! Where did he get lamb?” Mike asked with a big smile on his face. “It’s been a decade since the last time I tasted real lamb meat,” he said, heading toward the dining room with a bit of pep in his step. “Ban brought back some frozen packages of meat with DNA and cell samples for lambs, chickens, and rabbits. The town where she lived has an extensive research lab. They have been cloning domestic small animals to supplement their diets. These are Ban’s favorite meat dishes.” Page 151 “They even provided recipes in case no one remembered how to cook them. Since it’s been so long since anyone has seen these animals, much less cooked one,” Jessica told them as they seated themselves around the table. “Our scientists here have been able to duplicate the process.	Pero también los conocía lo suficiente como para ser paciente; eventualmente le contarían todo. Por ahora, nadie decía nada. —La cena está servida cuando gusten —anunció el chef Jabari por el intercomunicador del comedor. —Gracias a Dios —dijo Jessica—. Están demasiado callados para mi gusto; quizá el costillar de cordero que preparó el chef los haga hablar. —¿Qué?! ¿De dónde sacó cordero? —preguntó Mike con una gran sonrisa—. Hace una década que no pruebo carne de cordero de verdad —añadió mientras se dirigía al comedor con más energía. —Ban trajo algunos paquetes congelados con ADN y muestras celulares de corderos, pollos y conejos. El pueblo donde vivía tiene un laboratorio de investigación muy avanzado. Han estado clonando animales domésticos pequeños para complementar su dieta. Estos son los platos favoritos de Ban. Página 151 —Incluso proporcionaron recetas por si nadie recordaba cómo cocinarlos. Ha pasado tanto tiempo desde que alguien ha visto estos animales, mucho menos cocinado uno —les explicó Jessica mientras tomaban asiento alrededor de la mesa—. Nuestros científicos han logrado duplicar el proceso.
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They say in the next year or so, they will be able to provide enough animal protein for the entire city since we only eat meat during celebrations.”

Jason said grace, and they began to eat. “Hm....hm....hm....hm,” were the only sounds at the table for the first few minutes.

Finally, Mike looked over at JD.
“So, son, I know you want to talk about something important, and a moral issue is at the bottom of it. I know this because you asked your Uncle Jason to come.”
JD reluctantly set down his knife and fork. “You know me well, Dad.”

He picked up his wine glass and took a big swallow. With a look of shame for what he was about to do, he said, “I have made a big mistake, and Dad, I need your help to rectify things. I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t important to me.”

JD took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. “I have impregnated a young lady. Who does not wish to marry me, but she wants to keep the child.”

He went on quickly. “She is one of the refugees from America. So, she didn’t know our strict rules on procreation. She has been told she must abort the baby or leave the New Union.”

By this time, everyone at the table had stopped eating. They were all looking at him with the same shocked expression. Mike spoke first.

“Son, I can’t believe you have acted so irresponsibly.”

Dicen que en el próximo año podrán proporcionar suficiente proteína animal para toda la ciudad, ya que solo comemos carne en celebraciones.

Jason dio las gracias, y comenzaron a comer. —Mmm... mmm... mmm... — fueron los únicos sonidos en la mesa durante los primeros minutos.

Finalmente, Mike miró a JD.
—Hijo, sé que quieres hablar de algo importante, y que en el fondo hay un dilema moral. Lo sé porque invitaste a tu tío Jason.
JD dejó el cuchillo y el tenedor con cierta relucencia.
—Me conoces bien, papá.

Tomó su copa de vino y bebió un buen trago. Con una expresión de vergüenza por lo que estaba a punto de decir, continuó:
—He cometido un gran error y, papá, necesito tu ayuda para arreglarlo. No lo pediría si no fuera importante para mí.

JD respiró hondo y exhaló lentamente.
—He dejado embarazada a una joven... que no desea casarse conmigo, pero quiere tener al bebé.

Se apresuró a añadir:
—Es una de las refugiadas de América, así que no conocía nuestras estrictas normas sobre la procreación. Le han dicho que debe abortar o abandonar la Nueva Unión.

Para entonces, todos en la mesa habían dejado de comer. Lo miraban con la misma expresión de sorpresa. Mike habló primero.

—Hijo, no puedo creer que hayas actuado con tanta irresponsabilidad.

Jessica practically threw her napkin to the table and said, “There is not a woman in all our lands who wouldn’t give anything to marry you. You are handsome, one of the most intelligent Page 152 young men in the New Union, and you are the son of the Prime Minister. I want to know who she is! And who she thinks she is!?” Jason, trying to ease some of the tension in the room, asked, “JD, did you meditate on this?” “Yes sir, it is the first thing I did. As a result, I am sitting here with you guys, asking for your help. This young lady means a lot to me. To ask her to give up what she believes in is unfair. You taught me that, Uncle Jason. We should always find ways to work together with those who believe differently from us,” JD said as he looked around the table at each of them. Finally, Jason said, “First, let’s take the time to pray together.” Looking at JD he said, “We must also be given the chance to meditate on this problem. Maybe we can come up with a solution that is suitable for everyone. Now, let’s pray.” Mike sat unmoving, arms folded across his chest, looking at his son closely. Finally, he reached out and held hands with them, and Jason began to pray.	Jessica prácticamente arrojó la servilleta sobre la mesa. —¡No hay una sola mujer en toda nuestra nación que no daría lo que fuera por casarse contigo! Eres apuesto, uno de los jóvenes más inteligentes Página 152 de la Nueva Unión, y el hijo del primer ministro. ¡Quiero saber quién es ella! ¿Y quién se cree que es? Jason, tratando de aliviar un poco la tensión en la habitación, preguntó: —JD, ¿meditaste sobre esto? —Sí, señor, fue lo primero que hice. Por eso estoy aquí con ustedes, pidiendo su ayuda. Esta joven significa mucho para mí. Pedirle que renuncie a lo que cree es injusto. Usted me enseñó eso, tío Jason. Siempre debemos encontrar maneras de trabajar junto a quienes piensan diferente a nosotros —dijo JD mientras miraba a cada uno alrededor de la mesa. Finalmente, Jason dijo: —Primero, tomémonos un momento para orar juntos —miró a JD—. También debemos darnos tiempo para meditar sobre este problema. Tal vez podamos encontrar una solución que sea adecuada para todos. Ahora, oremos. Mike permaneció inmóvil, con los brazos cruzados sobre el pecho, observando atentamente a su hijo. Finalmente, extendió la mano y se unió a ellos, y Jason comenzó a orar.
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JD flew back to Togo the next day. He walked up the entryway to the home where Keyerra was staying with her dad. The door responded. "Hello, can you verify your identity, please?" JD put his hand on the scanner, and it glowed green. "One moment, Staff Sergeant Williams. Staff Sergeant Johnson will be with you shortly." Keyerra met him at the door. She looked tired and haggard. "Please, come in," she said as she stood aside to allow him to enter. "I asked Dad to join us." She smiled warmly at Avery. "I've learned my lesson about keeping secrets. I hope that is ok with you." "Sure, that's fine with me. It will save me a trip to his office," he responded, following her into the living area. Avery stood as he entered the room and shook JD's hand. "My daughter says you may have a solution to our problem," Avery said as he held onto the young man's hand. "Can we all sit down, sir? It's rather complicated, but I think it will work out if Keyerra can agree to the terms," he said, looking into her eyes.	Al día siguiente, JD voló de regreso a Togo. Caminó por la entrada de la casa donde Keyerra se estaba quedando con su padre. La puerta respondió: —Hola, ¿puede verificar su identidad, por favor? JD colocó su mano en el escáner, y este brilló en verde. —Un momento, sargento primero Williams. La sargento primero Johnson estará con usted en breve. Keyerra lo recibió en la puerta. Se veía cansada y agotada. —Por favor, pasa —dijo, apartándose para dejarlo entrar—. Le pedí a papá que se uniera a nosotros. Le sonrió cálidamente a Avery. —He aprendido la lección sobre guardar secretos. Espero que eso esté bien contigo. —Claro, está bien para mí. Me ahorrará un viaje a su oficina —respondió él, siguiéndola hacia la sala. Avery se puso de pie cuando él entró y le estrechó la mano. —Mi hija dice que puedes tener una solución a nuestro problema —dijo Avery mientras sostenía la mano del joven. —¿Podemos sentarnos todos, señor? Es algo complicado, pero creo que puede funcionar si Keyerra acepta las condiciones —dijo, mirando directamente a sus ojos.
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Third Chapter

3.1 Challenges and Solutions

As 1-2026 Final Project students of the School of English (David), after having a round table, product of rainstorms of ideas and discussions, we came up as a community of learning with the following challenges and solutions:

Challenges	Impact on Author's Tone/Meaning	Solution / Strategy	Translation Techniques Applied	Notes
Specialized terminology (field-specific words)	Loss of precision, altered credibility	Build/glossary, consult subject experts, check source references	Terminology management, borrowing, calque, standardization	Maintain glossary across 50 pages
Cultural references / local customs	Reader misunderstanding or misinterpretation of intent	Footnotes, brief adaptation, or cultural substitution after checking authorial intent	Cultural substitution, explication, footnoting	Prefer explication when tone is explanatory
Idioms & fixed expressions	Literal translation destroys idiomatic meaning or tone	Find target-language equivalent or rephrase to preserve effect	Equivalence, modulation, paraphrase	Keep register consistent
Authorial voice / narrative persona	Flattened or inconsistent voice across chapters	Analyze voice features, create voice profile, apply consistently, author queries	Stylistic equivalence, modulation, transposition	Document voice choices for consistency
Register and formality shifts	Misplaced formality changes character relations or tone	Map register levels, mirror shifts, test with sample readers	Register matching, modulation	Track characters' registers in glossary
Ambiguity or deliberate vagueness	Loss of interpretive openness or double meanings	Preserve ambiguity where possible; annotate choices in	Literal translation, deliberate ambiguity retention	Flag for editor/author if clarification threatens intent

Challenges	Impact on Author's Tone/Meaning	Solution / Strategy	Translation Techniques Applied	Notes
		queries to author/editor		
Humor, wordplay, puns	Jokes fail or change meaning/tone	Recreate humor using target-language mechanisms or add translator note	Compensation, creative equivalence, paraphrase	Prioritize reader effect over literalness
Long, complex sentences (syntactic density)	Reader fatigue: rhythm and emphasis lost	Break into balanced clauses while keeping emphasis and rhythm	Transposition, segmentation, condensation	Preserve key focal elements
Dialect, sociolect, or slang	Loss of social identity and voice nuances	Find target-language sociolect analog or neutralize carefully; document choices	Dialectal substitution, neutralization, explication	Use sparingly; keep consistency
Intertextual references / quotations	Missed layers of meaning or author's allusions	Identify sources, add brief notes or adapt references	Cultural substitution, annotation, calque	Verify copyright for quoted materials
Emotional intensity and subtext	Flattened affect or exaggerated tone	Recreate emotional markers (lexical, punctuation), test with back-translation	Emotive equivalence, modulation	Keep dialogue pacing and sentence length similar
Inconsistent terminology/choices across 50 pages	Reader confusion; breaks in coherence	Use CAT tools, glossary, project TB, regular QA passes	Standardization, terminological consistency	Run QA at milestones
Layout, peritexts, and typographic cues	Loss of emphasis, irony, or pacing	Reproduce pretext faithfully; mirror	Formal correspondence,	Coordinate with publisher for design

Challenges	Impact on Author's Tone/Meaning	Solution / Strategy	Translation Techniques Applied	Notes
		typography when possible	typographic equivalence	
Time pressure and workload management	Rushed choices harming quality and consistency	Create schedule, milestone reviews, peer review, buffer for queries	Revision cycles, iterative editing	Prioritize early glossary and voice profile
Authorial queries & unresolved source issues	Risk of wrong assumption altering meaning	Compile queries list, send consolidated questions to author/editor	Collaborative translation, query management	Keep queries precise and limited per round

3.2 Conclusions

As 1-2026 Final Project students at Universidad Latina School of English with an emphasis in translation in David, Chiriqui, and after virtual forums and discussions, we conclude the following as a community of learning:

The study concludes that equivalence in translation between English and Spanish is a flexible, context-dependent objective rather than a rigid formula. Successful translations balance semantic fidelity with pragmatic and stylistic adaptation, privileging authorial intent over literal word-for-word rendering when cultural or structural mismatches arise. In practice, this means applying modulation, paraphrase, and selective explicitation to preserve meaning while ensuring naturalness in the target language. Training translators to diagnose when to prioritize form, sense, or effect markedly improves translation consistency and reader reception.

Reconstructing and preserving authorial voice and register is essential and achievable through systematic analysis and consistent application of stylistic choices. Creating voice profiles, tracking formality markers, and documenting rhetorical devices across the project prevent fragmentation of tone across chapters. Both English/Spanish and Spanish/English transfers require deliberate adjustments like syntactic rhythm and modality shift to maintain narrative persona. When supported by voice sheets and annotated corpora, translators can reliably reproduce the author's distinctive voice.

Cultural mediation is an inherent part of bilingual translation and must be approached as an interpretive, not merely technical, act. Decisions about domesticating or foreignizing cultural references should be guided by the intended readership, authorial intent, and the communicative function of the passage. Paratextual elements such as titles, dedications, and notes shape reception and deserve careful treatment rather than being treated as peripheral. Collaborative dialogue with editors and sensitivity to target-culture publishing norms enhance the translator's ability to preserve layered meanings.

Managing specialized terminology and technical registers requires a proactive, iterative workflow combining term bases, corpus consultation, and subject-matter expertise. For domain-specific passages, consistency and alignment with target-language standards prevent drift and maintain credibility. CAT tools and glossaries are invaluable for large sections but must be complemented by manual vetting to resolve polysemy and context-dependent choices. Documenting terminological decisions during revision cycles secures coherence across the full 50-page stretch.

A pragmatic repertoire of problem/solving strategies like compensation, explicitation, modulation, and paraphrase enables translators to handle cases where direct equivalence is impossible. Strategy selection should depend on genre, communicative function, and desired reader effect rather than fixed prescriptions. English/Spanish segments often benefit from modulation and paraphrase to retain implicatures, while Spanish/English passages may require explicitation for cultural presuppositions. Teaching decision-making frameworks and reflective practice improves translators' adaptive competence under real project constraints.

A multi-stage methodological framework that consists of source analysis, voice profiling, glossary creation, draft translation, targeted revision, and peer review, substantially reduces drift in tone and meaning. Empirical checkpoints such as back-translation and native-speaker review prove effective for maintaining idiomaticity and technical precision. Technology (CAT tools, version control) supports consistency and workflow but does not replace human judgment on stylistic and ethical choices. Transparent documentation of queries and decision rationales facilitates later editorial work and maintains accountability.

Translator education and professional practice must integrate linguistic skill, cultural literacy, ethical awareness, and project-management procedures. Ethical imperative that are preserving authorial intent, avoiding unwarranted domestication, and responsibly handling ambiguous or sensitive material should be central in training and practice. Project-based curricula that simulate the full lifecycle of a 50-page translation, combined with supervised collaboration with subject experts and editors, best prepare students for professional demands. Ongoing research into human–

technology workflows and reception studies will further strengthen practice and pedagogy in English Spanish translation.

As students of Universidad Latina de Panamá in David, we must conclude that the practical challenges and solutions documented in this thesis mirror his own classroom and internship experiences; engaging directly with source authors, building collaborative glossaries, and applying iterative revisions proved decisive in preserving voice and meaning across English /Spanish and Spanish/English projects. This lived perspective underscores the value of combining academic theory with hands-on practice, and it affirms that institutional support that access to corpora, faculty mentorship, and peer review which significantly enhances a novice translator's ability to produce consistent, ethically grounded, and publishable work.

3.3 Recommendations

This introduction presents the recommendations compiled for the final project of the School of English, with an emphasis on translation practice and pedagogy. A group of students from Universidad Latina de Panamá, working collaboratively during Quarter 1–2026 and including David as a contributing member, prepared these guidelines to support systematic, ethical, and high-quality English/Spanish and Spanish/English translations. The recommendations synthesize classroom experience, internship insights, and applied project work to address process planning, technique selection, AI use, collaborative workflows, online resources, and translator documentation. These concise, practice-oriented recommendations aim to guide future student projects and professional submissions, promoting consistency, transparency, and continual improvement.

First, the translation process should begin with a structured pre-translation phase in which the translator conducts a thorough source analysis, defines project scope, and produces a prioritized list of problematic passages. The translator prepares a preliminary timeline with milestones for glossary creation, draft completion, revision cycles, and final QA to avoid last-minute compromises. The translator segments the text into manageable blocks that preserve contextual continuity and assigns review tasks (terminology, voice, idiomaticity) to specific passes. The translator performs an initial alignment of recurring terms and names to kick-start the term base and translation memory. The translator schedules periodic check-ins with supervisors or peers to reassess strategy and progress. The translator archives interim versions and change logs to ensure traceability and ease rollback if needed.

Second, the application of translation techniques should follow a decision-rule approach in which the translator matches technique to communicative function rather than habit. The translator chooses modulation and paraphrase for idiomatic and pragmatic adjustments, explicitation when cultural or presuppositional gaps would confuse the target reader, and literal retention for legally or technically constrained passages. The translator uses compensation to recreate lost stylistic effects in proximate segments and employs transposition and syntactic reordering

to preserve rhythm and emphasis. The translator documents representative examples of technique use in the decision log to justify choices during review. The translator evaluates cumulative effects of repeated technique use to prevent register drift. The translator refines technique selection during revision based on native-speaker feedback.

Thirdly, the use of artificial intelligence should be strategic, transparent, and supervised by the translator at every stage. The translator employs AI tools for draft generation, terminology extraction, concordance searches, and as a productivity aid but treats AI output as raw material requiring rigorous human editing. The translator configures and trains domain-specific translation memories or models where possible and validates AI suggestions against authoritative sources and style profiles. The translator annotates where AI assisted in the appendix and documents any automated decisions that affect meaning or style. The translator safeguards confidentiality and copyright by checking provider terms and, when necessary, using local or licensed models for sensitive texts. The translator performs targeted manual passes to correct hallucinations, register errors, and cultural misreadings introduced by AI.

In addition, work in collaboration should be organized with clear roles, responsibilities, and communication protocols to maximize efficiency and quality. The project lead assigns tasks for glossary maintenance, source consultation, native-speaker review, and final QA and ensures reviewers receive the voice-profile and decision log. The team schedules regular review meetings and uses consolidated query batches to streamline author or editor interactions. The project uses shared cloud resources with version control and access permissions so collaborators can work concurrently without overwriting each other's changes. The project records reviewer comments, accepted changes, and unresolved issues in a shared decision log to maintain transparency. The project fosters a culture of constructive critique and collective responsibility for final quality.

On the other hand, the use of online resources should combine primary authoritative references, corpora, and community expertise to support informed decisions. The

translator consults bilingual and monolingual corpora, specialized glossaries, academic databases, and style guides appropriate to the genre. The translator verifies terminology with professional associations, standards bodies, or published technical manuals when available. The translator supplements formal references with moderated forums and specialist communities for clarifying usage and idiomatic choices, while critically evaluating crowd-sourced answers. The translator bookmarks and documents useful queries and search results in the project file to justify choices. The translator prioritizes stable, citable sources for published work and treats ephemeral web content as supportive rather than definitive.

Finally, the analysis and notes of the translator should be systematic, searchable, and integral to the deliverables so future editors and translators can follow the rationale. The translator maintains a source-analysis document, a voice-profile sheet, an evolving glossary, and a timestamped query-and-decision log that links entries to text locations. The translator includes annotated examples of problematic passages, alternative renderings considered, and the reasons for the chosen solution. The translator summarizes unresolved items and recommends follow-up actions for editors or authors. The translator exports key documentation (glossary, decision log, voice profile) as appendices to the final package and retains editable working files for an agreed retention period. The translator reflects on lessons learned and records process metrics (time per page, revision rounds, recurring problem types) to inform future projects and pedagogy.

3.4 Glossary

1. **Justicia** — **justice**
Definition: The maintenance or administration of what is just, especially by the impartial adjustment of competing claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments.
Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Justice. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.
Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/justice>
2. **Poder** — **power**
Definition: Ability to act or produce an effect; capacity to influence or control the behavior of others or the course of events.
Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Power. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.
Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/power>
3. **Libertad** — **freedom**
Definition: The state of being free; the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action.
Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Freedom. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.
Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freedom>
4. **Comunidad** — **community**
Definition: A unified body of individuals: such as people with common interests living in a particular area or people interacting with one another within a social system.
Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Community. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.
Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community>
5. **Igualdad** — **equality**
Definition: The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Equality. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equality>

6. **Futuro** — **future**

Definition: Time that is to come; events that will or are likely to happen. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Future. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/future>

7. **Resistir** — **resist**

Definition: To exert force in opposition; to withstand the force or effect of. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Resist. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resist>

8. **Rebelión** — **rebellion**

Definition: Open, armed, and usually organized resistance to one in authority or to the established government. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Rebellion. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rebellion>

9. **Sociedad** — **society**

Definition: An organized group of persons associated together for religious, benevolent, cultural, scientific, political, patriotic, or other purposes. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Society. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/society>

10. **Carrera** — **career** (or **race**)

Definition: Career — an occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person's life and with opportunities for progress; Race — a contest of speed. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Career. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.

Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/career>

11. **Destino** — **destiny**

Definition: That which is to happen or has happened to a particular person or thing; fate.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Destiny. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.

Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/destiny>

12. **Alianza** — **alliance**

Definition: A formal agreement or treaty between two or more nations, parties, or people to cooperate for specific purposes.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Alliance. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.

Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alliance>

13. **Coraje** — **courage**

Definition: Mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Courage. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.

Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/courage>

14. **Lucha** — **struggle**

Definition: To make strenuous or violent efforts in the face of difficulties or opposition.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Struggle. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.

Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/struggle>

15. **Equidad** — **equity**

Definition: Justice according to natural law or right; freedom from bias or favoritism.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Equity. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equity>

16. **Esperanza** — **hope**

Definition: To want something to happen or be true and to believe that it is possible or likely.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Hope. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hope>

17. **Identidad** — **identity**

Definition: The collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitively recognizable or known.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Identity. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity>

18. **Territorio** — **territory**

Definition: A geographic area belonging to or under the jurisdiction of a governmental authority or a defined inhabited area.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Territory. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/territory>

19. **Alianza** — **alliance**

Definition: A formal agreement or treaty between two or more nations, parties, or people to cooperate for specific purposes.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Alliance. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alliance>

20. **Conflicto** — **conflict**

Definition: A fight, battle, or struggle, especially a protracted one; a clash of

interests, ideas, or wills.
Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Conflict. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.
Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conflict>

21. **Decisión** — **decision**

Definition: A conclusion or resolution reached after consideration; the act of deciding.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Decision. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.
Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/decision>

22. **Revolución** — **revolution**

Definition: A fundamental change in political power or organizational structures that takes place in a relatively short period of time.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Revolution. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.
Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revolution>

23. **Valores** — **values**

Definition: Principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Value. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.
Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/value>

24. **Propósito** — **purpose**

Definition: The reason for which something exists or is done; an intended or desired result.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Purpose. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.
Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/purpose>

25. **Sacrificio:**

sacrifice

Definition: The act of giving up something valued for the sake of something else regarded as more important or worthy.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Sacrifice. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.

Retrieved 02/14/2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sacrifice>

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Annex

Book 2
the Beale Group Series

UTOPIA





B.R Herron
Author



David, 02 de junio de 2025

Señora

Betty Herron

Autora de

“Utopía”

E. S. M.

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Sin más que agregar, le agradecemos su valiosa atención y contribución

Atentamente,

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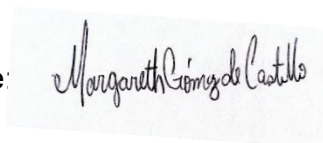
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