

Lemma

Question:

- It's 2025, it would seem weird if tech wasn't a bit different right? But is it unobtrusive enough.

Chapter 1

- **Dmitri and Ivan Shevchenko**

Broad, gloomy Dmitri Shevchenko leaned forward in his chair in the second to last row of the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Kiev. He fiddled with his fingers and, in a practiced furtive way, scanned the room. The Patriarch raised the cup and wafer over his head, his back to the crowd he half-chanted, "Thine own of Thine own, we offer You, in behalf of all, and for all!"

There was genuine feeling in it, odd. Religion is like that, you go through the motions in monotone for years and then one day you realize what you've been saying all at once. He stopped pressing his folded hands and craned his neck at the dais. Goddamn it he hated this building. The glossy marble floor, polished to a mirror, took any rare scrap of Kiev light and lit the massive white dome and every square centimeter of the aniseptic, cornerless transept. You could barely smell the incense.

The congregation rose and responded, "We praise You, we bless You, we thank You, O Lord, and we pray to You, our God." A younger man sat behind him to the right. "I love this church, my favorite game is Patriarch or Mullah."

Dmitri leaned back, and showed himself in profile. His shoulders rose

in a smirk, as he involuntarily put a hand to his beard, "Convert or die Mykhailo. It's coming in nicely don't you think?"

"Like a bird's nest. Actually no, like a brillo pad. We could use a cutting for dishes back at barracks."

"The perks of freedom include devotion."

"So what are you, like, Italian? Who's your Papist holy man?"

Dmitri turned further and shot him a playful glare, "Sviatoslav? He's from Lviv. Where I'll be going just as soon as you hand it over. I can't wait to get the fuck out of Kiev. This cathedral is an embarrassment. You know, I was here when it opened."

"Really? It's that new?"

"Damn, you are young and southern. It was 2011. I was an altar boy."

"Get out! Why would they bring you from Lviv?"

"I was the best at it at the old Cathedral with the old Patriarch. St. Georges." He leaned back sideways and looked around. "That's a church. The statues, the 300-year-old icons, the stations of the cross from some serf's hand in the Hetmanate." He caught himself speaking too loudly. "You could smell centuries worth of incense in the walls. Not like this... operating room. Where's the mystery? You can't transubstantiate with a scalpel."

"What?"

"And it's on the wrong side of the river. Kiev's fine. A patriotic Ukrainian capital, but it's not for me. And it's not the only place with culture."

"The hero of Donetsk can't stand a couple hours in his own beautiful capital. Sad."

Dmitri smiled, "You miss me that much?"

Mikhailo looked away for a moment, "Yeah, kinda. We get it though. But the Russians and the Turks, and the goddamn EU." He looked around, they hadn't attracted too much attention. "It's just," he leaned forward and sighed and put a USB into Dmitri's suddenly open palm, "like even the allies don't really want us to win. The enemy is a constant phantom, we don't fight armies we fight rumors."

"The American journalists were with us in Donetsk, after what they saw I had to leave." He shrugged and fiddled with the USB stick. "Thanks, Mikhailo. I'm glad there's someone out there who doesn't think I'm a war criminal. Go. They're about to do communion."

Mikhailo stood up with the rest of the crowd, paused and opened his mouth to speak, but nodded and walked off. They chanted, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord, the Lord is God and has revealed Himself to us." Then row by row they filed into the main aisle and queued for the eucharist. Dmitri waited for five minutes and left.

It was overcast and the Dneiper looked like sludge. He knew he shouldn't be so negative, this was his first mission as a private contractor. Now he could remain in the fight, grow his beard, and see his family. It was what he wanted, but he didn't feel right.

He unclipped his stick. It had been pulsing silently for most of the liturgy. Its tip was flashing blue and yellow, one of Ivan's mods. He snapped open the baton and it spoke in his ear, "125 new messages from Ivan. Message one: ". He closed it immediately and white knuckle power-walked toward the nearest business. Goddamn church in the middle of goddamn nowhere.

He found a Starbucks, spot checked the patrons, and slipped into the bathroom. He snapped the stick open. It projected the video on the wall and spoke the message directly into his ear. The video was blank, fucking Ivan, so shy he can't even video his own brother.

Ivan spoke frantically, "You'll never believe this. I don't believe it. Nothing could do this. It's impossible, impossible. Even you'll understand immediately. Impossible!"

"Next message."

This time there was no sound. Only video. A bash terminal watching a background process, an intruder. Rows of 1024-bit hashes flitted across the screen. After a minute Ivan whispered in awe, "It's cracking them. They're all SHA5." It continued and he paused. "I'm in qubes, wait. Shit, I need"

Dmitri was white and wide eyed. Each hash should have taken the age of several universes.

"Next message."

The same video. "That was close. I'm stay ahead of it. I'll keep piping it until you answer."

The video cut off, Ivan was calling.

- **Julie Li**

Slow pedal, wind and leaf in autumn. Tibia, fibula, femur, quad and calf. How one pulls while the other pushes - how can sinew push?

- **Vikram Apte**

He's having a bad day.

Does he usually start with 'sun salutation'

Boss name is Sunil.

They're sending him to Australia immediately.

Just writing "chapter 1" puts a huge chill on the writing effort