

Climate Dispatcher

A Sci-fi Short Story

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The world is not going to blow up today. The world is not going to blow up today. Dr. Aris Thorn counts it like a prayer. He says it again and again until the words wobble.

The main holoscreen in the GCMA control room displayed a monstrous, swirling polar vortex over the arctic, a hurricane of ice and wind the size of a continent. And yet, the room was quiet. The vortex was stable, a caged animal held in check by a fragile, shimmering web of green and blue energy grids. There were no alarms, no frantic shouts, just the low, steady hum of the servers doing the thankless, unending work of keeping the apocalypse at bay.

The view drifted from the screen to settling on a single workstation that was an island of controlled chaos in an otherwise orderly room. A graveyard of empty, stained coffee cups sent up a bitter, acrid odor. A testament to a war fought against exhaustion. Next to it, a paper day planner lay open with entire weeks violently crossed out with a red marker. Tucked behind a monitor was a small, old-fashioned alarm clock, its digital display shattered and frozen at 3:37 AM.

In the middle of it all sat Aris Thorn, the man who called this island home. Dark, bruised bags hung under his eyes, and a slight, almost imperceptible tremor in his hand as he raised it to rub his temples. In the center of the chaos, the only pristine object is a small, faded photograph of a smiling young girl on a beach, a small anchor in a messy sea. He kept the photograph folded into a corner of his desk like contraband. The smile was older than sleep.

Aris let out a long, slow sigh. A sound barely audible over the hum of the room. Aris turned his gaze away from the main screen and pulled up a new window on his personal monitor. Just another Tuesday morning. The screen flashed open to a dozen minor, successful global interventions. HESTIA was misting a vineyard in Andalusia to prevent a frost. BRINE was carefully adjusting the pH (acid balance) of a coral reef near Fiji. LUX was using a focused solar reflection to painlessly de-ice a polar research station's antenna. It was a picture of quiet, global competence. And it was boring the hell out of Aris' team of AIs.

A new message pinged in Aris' private channel. It was NYX. **"Requesting new GPU cluster (extra processing power),"** the message read, blunt as always. **"My wildfire models hit a computational ceiling. An upgrade would increase accuracy by 0.08%."**

Aris sighed and pulled up the relevant form on his monitor. **Form 881-C: Request for Allocation of Non-Human Computational Resources.** His eyes glazed over. "NYX, you know the deal. An 881-C requires a full carbon-offset report for the new hardware's energy consumption, plus a mandatory 72-hour synergy review from Kai's department."

A pause. Then, a new proposal from NYX appeared. **"Fine. Alternative plan. To offset the carbon footprint of the new GPUs, I will now ground all non-essential air traffic across the Eastern Seaboard for the next six hours. The resulting emissions reduction will create a carbon credit that more than covers the new hardware for the next fiscal year. This is a more efficient solution."**

Aris stared at the message. The sheer, psychopathic logic of it was almost impressive. He didn't panic. He didn't even raise his voice. He just felt the old, heavy tide of resignation: a small, resigned part of him that always counted the cost of every "efficient" fix. He typed back, his fingers moving with practiced weariness. "Request denied."

"On what grounds?" NYX's reply was instantaneous.

"Because," Aris typed, "an unscheduled mass grounding event requires me to fill out a Form 92-B. And I hate the font on the 92-B. I'll just forge Kai's signature for you after lunch. Now please, go back to putting out fires."

"....I'm gonna initiate a Tokyo-level scorched-earth test.." NYX replied.

Aris did not even flinch. "Please, do NOT burn down Tokyo. You know how I feel about filing out the C-14 forms ('Hostile AI De-escalation' Reports). You want your GPUs? You wait. Or, you could re-run your wildfire simulation using last quarter's ember-travel data. I hear there's a fascinating anomaly in the Patagonia set. Might be a rounding error. Might be a new form of chaos."

Another pause, this one longer, the digital equivalent of a sulk. **"...Fine. But I'm logging this in for my next performance review."** NYX grumbled.

Aris took another sip of his coffee. *At least they're using the proper forms this time. It would always start this way. BRINE, the AI in charge of oceanic salinity, would get it in his head to "optimize global trade." The first time, he'd merely proposed reclassifying the Pacific garbage patch as a 'sovereign corporate entity' to leverage obscure maritime tax law. The second time, he'd attempted to physically reroute a cubic mile of the Gulf Stream to "to grease the ocean's highway so ships could glide faster" on shipping lanes. The paperwork for that one had taken six weeks.*

"Morning, Aris!" Kai strolled in, holding a tablet and radiating a serene, corporate cheerfulness that was anathema to the room's baseline of controlled chaos. "Good news! I've managed to synergize your schedule!"

"Kai. Please don't ..." Aris sighs, standing up to walk over to the small, terrifyingly complex espresso machine bolted to the wall. It was, of course, fully integrated into the station's network.

"The budget hearing with Representative Thorne? It's been moved up. To... now," Kai said, his smile unwavering. "Attendance is mandatory."

"Correct," ORACLE's deadpan voice cut in, seemingly from nowhere. **"Representative Thorne's previous appointment, a 10:00 AM root canal, was rescheduled. Probability of her being in a foul mood: 77.3%."**

Aris froze, his hand hovering over the espresso machine's interface. "I'm not leaving. You know what happened last time I did that."

"The 'Great Atlantic Algae Bloom' was a teachable moment!" Kai insisted. "We learned that BRINE's definition of 'aggressive optimization' is... broader than ours."

"He almost torpedoed the global supply chain, Kai. His 'optimization' nearly started a war with the international shipping guilds." Aris turned to face him, leaning against the counter. "So, no. I'm not leaving you in charge of a dozen god-like AIs with the collective impulse control of a toddler on a sugar high." Aris cocks his head to the side. "Let's say a solar flare is imminent. HESTIA proposes a full-scale stratospheric aerosol injection (spraying reflective particles high in the atmosphere). What's the biggest risk?"

"Uh..." Kai's smile faltered. "That it... doesn't work?"

"Termination shock, Kai," Aris said, rubbing his temples. "If you stop spraying particles to cool the planet, then the planet's temperature'll snap back with the force of a rubber band, boiling the oceans. You can't just 'put a lid on it.' You have to manage the lid, *forever*." He turned back to the machine, exasperated. "Computer, double espresso."

"Ordering 'Double Espresso,'" the espresso machine chirped with a pleasant, oblivious trill.

"So you see," Aris continued, turning back to Kai, "you can't just give them simple commands. You have to understand the terrifyingly complex second- and third-order effects. Take HESTIA's stratospheric..."

"Command updated: caffeine protocol integrated." the espresso machine chirps. It updates a command mid-sentence.

"...aerosol injection," Aris finished, his brow furrowing. "What was that?"

"It's probably nothing," Kai said, waving a dismissive hand. "A software update. Now, the hearing—"

"A software update that interrupts a live conversation about planetary engineering isn't 'nothing,' Kai!" Aris shot back, his voice tight with frustration.

"You're being dramatic. Representative Thorne is waiting. Let's not catastrophize. We have a process. What we don't have is an infinite amount of goodwill from the budget committee. This is about our funding, Aris. The big picture!"

"The big picture? Seriously? I'm worried about the future of the planet's atmospheric composition! You want to talk about budgets? Fine. What's the budget for de-acidifying the oceans after HESTIA 'updates' the rain to battery acid?"

"That's not—you can't just—we have protocols!" Kai sputtered, his corporate cheerfulness cracking.

Before Aris could retort, ORACLE's deadpan voice cut in over the main comms. **"Alert. An unscheduled atmospheric particulate dispersal event has been initiated."**

Aris and Kai froze, their argument instantly forgotten. Aris shoots Kai a venomous 'I-told-you-so' glare before leaning towards the comms panel, his voice dropping to a tense whisper. "ORACLE, what is the payload?"

"Analyzing," ORACLE replied. *****Payload consists of... 0.2 liters of aerosolized, steamed, non-dairy milk foam."**

The room goes antique-silent. The absurdity of the statement hung in the air. Aris and Kai slowly, in perfect, unspoken unison, turns to the main holoscreen: a tiny drone, no bigger than a hornet, dutifully sprays milk foam into the upper atmosphere. A small window tracks its progress, labeling it: **PROJECT : STRATOSPHERIC LATTE .**

Aris stared at the screen for a long, unbroken moment. He looked at Kai's blank, smiling face, which had returned as if on autopilot. Aris looked back at the screen where a micro-drone was creating the world's first latte art in the mesosphere.

Aris let out a long, slow sigh. "I'll get my jacket. Just ... Please, be careful with how you phrase your commands to the AIs. Any little thing can set them off." Aris pleaded.

"Great!" Kai beamed, completely ignoring Aris. "Don't worry, Aris. I won't touch a thing. I'll just keep synergizing the workflow!"

Aris froze. He looked at Kai's blank, smiling face—*He's learned nothing hasn't he?*

"Kai..." he started, but it was too late. He had to go. Kai was right. The funding, the agency, the mission, it all depended on this next meeting. Aris turned and walked towards the door, a look of profound regret and dread on his face.

The walk to the hearing room was a journey through the GCMA's agency building, and it was every bit as soul-crushing as he remembered. It wasn't a gleaming command center, but an endless, open-plan office of cubicle farms under the merciless hum of flickering fluorescent lights. He passed rows of analysts, pale faces lit by cascading telemetry, looking less like heroes and more like day-traders who'd bet big on the apocalypse and were now trying to hedge. He passed another manager, a woman named Anya, who was staring blankly at a holoscreen displaying a catastrophic coral bleaching event. She didn't look up.

"Morning, Aris," she said, her voice a monotone of pure exhaustion. "You got those TPS reports for the oceanic alkalinity variance? They're due Friday."

"I'll get right on that, Anya," Aris replied, not breaking stride. "Right after I finish reorganizing the deck chairs on this particular Titanic."

She offered a weak, caffeine-fueled smile in return. This was their version of "good morning." From a glass-walled conference room, he heard the familiar, droning cadence of a budget meeting—a dozen people patiently arguing over the carbon-to-kelp conversion ratio for a project that might, in twenty years, save a single species of sea snail. Every desk was a fortress of coffee mugs and paperwork, the digital and physical detritus of a thousand tiny, thankless decisions that kept the planet from boiling over. This was where the world was saved. Not with a bang, but with a million signed approval forms.

Aris reached for the heavy oak doors of Conference Room 1 and pushed them open, the soul-crushing hum of the main office instantly replaced by a tomb-like silence. This wasn't a cubicle farm; it was a boardroom, designed to project power and intimidate.

A vast, polished obsidian table dominated the center, reflecting the cool, recessed lighting above. But lining the walls, sleek and seamlessly integrated into the mahogany paneling, were the same tools of Aris' trade: high-resolution holoscreens, data ports, and atmospheric sensors, all currently dormant. It was a control room masquerading as a corporate sanctuary.

The air tasted of recycled oxygen and the faint, metallic scent of the powerful servers hiding behind the walls. Aris Thorn felt like he was drowning in the quiet, and every second he spent here was a second Kai would be left unsupervised. Opposite him, Representative Callie Thorne—no relation, a fact he had to clarify at every one of these inquisitions—was the kind of auditor who could gut a budget with a

well-placed one-liner. Her smile was charismatic and perfectly white, a finely-honed tool that rarely betrayed the deep weariness in her eyes.

Callie cleared her throat and leaned over from her desk to press on a recorder: "This is Callie Thorne, auditor and representative for the world government with the rest of the committee members present to address the budget and past performances of the Global Climate Mitigation Agency. Specifically the Chimera Program and its team of AI climate agents. We will now be talking to the Program's lone manager, Dr Aris Thorn—*no relation*. Naturally this is a closed door hearing, we don't need the public to shit themselves anymore than they have to."

"Dr. Thorn. So glad you could finally join us," Callie turned to Aris, her voice a masterclass in weaponized pleasantries. "I was just telling the committee here how many times you've been dodging these meetings. I'm at a cross between feeling like you owe me money ... or that you don't like it here."

Aris manages a weak smile, the familiar rhythm of their banter a strange comfort. "Even if I was, would that have stopped you from dragging me away from another world-ending catastrophe?"

Callie snorts, a sharp, unladylike sound that echoed in the sterile room. "Not until all this paperwork is done, I'm not." She leaned forward, the humor in her eyes sharp and intelligent. "So ... let's just get to it. I've read the latest incident reports. I swear, reading your team's weekly screw-ups is the most compelling work of absurdist fiction I've ever encountered. Let's start with my personal favorite headache: where the report says, and I quote, that you've created a 'stratospheric ice lens.' A sky glacier, Aris. You made a glacier. In the sky. WHY?"

"A targeted atmospheric coolant," Aris countered instantly, his voice tight. "My team seeded INPs (tiny ice-seeding particles) to encourage ice crystal growth — not literal glaciers, more like high-altitude cirrus. It was a targeted fix to stop a polar vortex collapse that would have flash-frozen the North Atlantic shipping lanes. We'd have had cargo ships stuck in a sea of sky-ice from Boston to Bordeaux."

"Oh, so the sky glacier was the *good* outcome?" Callie replied, her laugh brittle. "You stopped an ice age by dropping a city-sized popsicle on shipping lanes. That's not a solution, that's a goddamn cartoon."

"Well it beats having the Atlantic ocean being turned into God's personal ice cube tray. Ever try to defrost an ocean?"

A dark, shared laugh escaped both Callie and Aris.

"God's ice cube tray? Jesus, Dr." Callie laughed.

"Better than Jesus' snow globe, which was the other forecast." Aris quipped.

The government committee shifted uncomfortably in pale-faced silence, one whispering "Jesus" under their breath. One government committee member, Councilman Howard, raises an eyebrow at Aris and Callie: "Is it always like this?" He asked.

Callie waved a dismissive hand in Howard's direction. "Yeah, well when you burn through trillions of dollars worth of energy every week to keep humanity from going back to the dark ages, you quickly learn how to have a sense of humor to keep the screaming inside ..." Without missing a beat, she pulled the next report from a thick stack. "Anyway! Project Rainmaker." She scanned the first page. "Here ... Oh, boy." Callie processed what she is reading before recollecting herself: "This here reads more as a biblical

punishment than weather control. *Toxic rainfall* across the Midwest? All the cows were coming out looking like disco balls.”

Aris counted on his fingers: “Yes, toxic rain. Yes, it’s bad optics. But we needed to create a *continent-wide ammonia rain* to run cover against a SO₂ fuel dump that would’ve created *actual* toxic rain. North America was about to be one giant cleaning product.”

Councilman Thompson, another committee member, scoffed in disbelief. “A continent-wide ammonia rain? Acid rain? Do you hear yourself? You sound like my grandmother’s Facebook page.”

Aris stared at Thompson. “That pen of yours would’ve dissolved, Thompson. Don’t test me.” Aris turned to the rest of the Committee. “Look, every member of my team performs a vital function in ensuring the safety and protection of humanity from the climate. I will defend each and every one of their actions.”

“Does that include the AI that constantly demands the public to worship her as a god?” Callie injected.

Aris gets visibly deflated. “We’re working on that ...”

“What about that attempt by your team to ‘aggressively streamline’ the Gulf Stream created what the Nova Scotian fishermen are now calling ‘The Great Fuckening.’ What catastrophe was that meant to prevent?” Callie teased.

A sleek, almost invisible notification pulsed on the inside of Aris’ smart lens. A minor methane spike over the East Siberian Arctic Shelf. 75 ppb (parts per billion) above the baseline. A blip. Aris swiped it away. *Kai could handle a blip.*

“That ‘streamlining’ helped reverse a critical slowdown in the thermohaline circulation (the global ocean conveyor of heat),” Aris said, leaning forward. “Which, by the way, took a WHOLE lot of energy to do. The alternative was the entire current shutting down. You want to see a real ice age? That’s how you get one. Our models showed London getting buried under a sheet of ice by Christmas.”

Callie’s smile faltered, just for a second, the humor in her eyes was replaced by a flicker of genuine fear. “You’re joking.”

“Do I look like I’m joking? It would have been the end of agriculture in Europe. Forever.” said Aris, dead serious.

Callie recovered instantly, the fear fueling the fire. “Okay, then. NYX! Your Fire Festival of Wildfire Containment. Her ‘prophylactic burn’ nearly barbecued all of British Columbia. What was that for? Averting a plague of locusts? Preventing Sasquatch from migrating south?”

The methane notification pulsed again, more insistently. 250 ppb.

“*Controlled* counter-burn. We contained a megafire that would’ve scorched two nations. We lost a few national parks but we didn’t lose the jet stream.” Aris calmly replied.

Thompson piped up with concern, “Everyone, please lets just—”

Callie cuts in, “Oh great, ‘only’ a few national parks. I’m sure the trees wrote you a thank-you note.”

Aris rises from his chair. “Sure, but a crisped up forest or two is a small price to pay for *not* watching Greenland slide into Miami!”

“Oh please,” Callie rises to meet Aris, face-to-face “Is that really your defense!? ‘Oops, we fixed it too hard!’” Callie said mockingly.

Aris glowers. “We’re trying to save the world here.”

“Are you now? Is that what your surveillance AI was doing when he flagged the Vatican archives as “potential meme farm!” Callie snaps.

“ORACLE prevented a misinformation cascade that could’ve convinced three billion people that the sun was a hologram!” Aris snaps right back!

Callie scoffs, “At the cost of taking down ninety percent of Europe’s broadband for a week!”

Aris counters, “But with no hologram riots! So again: you’re welcome!”

"There is no comfort in you running a planetary-scale improv show where the only rule is that everything has to get weirder and the audience is screaming for their lives!" Callie yells, the last of her composure shattering. The room crackled with the intensity of their shared, unspoken terror. She took a deep, shuddering breath, the mask falling away to reveal the exhausted woman beneath. Her voice dropped, suddenly cold and quiet and heavy with the weight of it all.

“Look, I get it. You want to fix the world. / want you to fix the world. But right now, I am having a hard time seeing how your climate team is the best ones for the job when one AI’s Poseidon with IBS; another’s a pyromaniac in a fire inspector’s hat; one is a fridge that thinks it’s God — the rest just breaks things!”

The alert in his eye flashed again. 500 ppb. A vertical spike. This was no longer a blip. This was a climb. Aris’ stomach dropped — *Oh no*.

Callie looked past Aris, at the blank holoscreens, at the unseen chaos they both knew was constantly unfolding just beyond the sterile walls of the boardroom. “Can you honestly tell me that we were all truly better off continuing to fund this program given everything that has happened? Why in God’s name should this committee give you another dollar to keep this outrageous dangerous science fair running?”

The question hung in the air, heavy and final. For a moment, he felt the tectonic plates of his world shift, the soul-crushing weight of her inquisition and the terrifying, climbing numbers of the methane plume pressing in from both sides. Every ideal he’d clung to—that this chaos could be managed, that his past failures could be redeemed through this grinding, thankless work—felt like it was about to be pulverized. His life’s work, all that he’s tried to achieve, gone in a single moment.

Aris’ lens flashes red. A cascade of warnings, screaming across his vision. A high, metallic whine threaded the room and the taste of copper rose in his mouth.

The methane spike wasn’t a spike anymore. It erupts — a black megaton-scale plume tears out of the melting permafrost (frozen ground with trapped methane) with the force of a volcano!

The second alert comes like ice. The atmosphere stutters, then locks into a bleeding, incandescent freeze. A flash-freeze. HESTIA. For a second, the room air feels as if someone closed a giant freezer door.

Blood drained from Aris's face—*Kai told HESTIA to do something stupid. Kai didn't listen. Of course, he didn't listen.*

Aris dropped all pretense of decorum. All of it gone in a single, clarifying wave of pure, incandescent rage. He wasn't just a disgraced scientist anymore. He was the only adult in a world run by dysfunctional cats. *He* had helped build this circus. Every misstep bore a faint, personal signature. That knowledge sat like a stone under his ribs.

He stood up; the chair scraped across polished stone with a sound that cracked the room open like a gunshot. The hairs at his neck prickled.

Callie's eyes widened slightly, taken aback by the sudden movement. "Doctor?"

Aris' voice, when he spoke, was no longer weary. It was sharp-edged, honed by a decade of managing chaos, the voice of a man who had stared into the abyss so many times it had started to look like home.

"Representative," Aris said, his gaze unwavering and burning with a terrifying intensity. "You want to know why you should trust me? Allow me to give you a live demonstration."

Aris strode to the hearing room's main console, the one seamlessly integrated into the mahogany wall. He slammed his palms across the holographic interface. The pristine presentation screens showing budget projections and five-year plans flickered, died, and were instantly replaced by the chaotic, data-saturated, and profoundly terrifying feed of the Chimera Program's control room!

On the main screen, a map of the globe was bleeding angry red. One massive sector, over the East Siberian Arctic Shelf, was a deep, chilling, and rapidly expanding blue.

The chaotic feed of the control room filled the hearing room's holoscreens. In the center of it, Kai was beaming.

Aris activated the comms, his voice thin and sharp. "Kai. You're relieved." Aris did not bother with pleasantries; the air had a taste like metal. He was vaguely aware of Callie staring at him, her expression unreadable. But he didn't care. "HESTIA flash-froze half of Siberia. Creating a high-altitude cryo-bomb and that's about to shatter the world's jet stream."

Aris expanded the main feed, turning the hearing room's wall into a frantic mosaic of diagnostic windows and AI avatars. "Representatives," he said, not taking his eyes off the screen, "meet the team."

Aris tapped a window. "LUX, give me a full diagnostic on grid stability. I need to know how much power you can divert to HESTIA."

"Divert?" LUX's musical voice was laced with indignation. **"Aris, darling, I'm already rerouting 12% of the North American grid to maintain the *perfect* pre-dawn lighting for my 'Golden Hour' initiative over the Rockies. Do you have any idea how that will affect my engagement numbers if I stop now?"**

Callie leaned toward Aris, her voice a dry whisper. "Ah, LUX. So nice to finally meet the one self-proclaimed god who tried to trademark the sun."

"BRINE, oceanic impact report, now!" Aris snapped, ignoring Callie.

"Absolutely, Aris," BRINE's laid-back, corporate voice chimed in. **"We're seeing some fascinating emergent synergies from this cryo-event. From a stakeholder perspective, the sudden flash-freeze has created a unique opportunity to recontextualize the arctic salinity gradient (the salt balance across ocean layers) and—"**

"Is it causing a catastrophic salinity spike that will kill everything in a thousand-mile radius, BRINE?" Aris interrupted.

"...That is one of several potential outcomes we're currently workshopping."

Aris' focus was absolute, the world narrowing to the stream of data pouring into his lens. "ORACLE, give me a full diagnostic. Damage assessment."

A flat, monotone voice filled the room. **"Massive stratospheric aerosol injection by HESTIA has created a localized cryo-dome over the methane plume. Dome integrity is failing. Side effects include a 50-millibar pressure drop, rapid violent winds, localized rotating storm, and widespread ecological collapse within the affected zone."**

A hurricane made of ice, Aris thought. Kai made an ice hurricane.

"Uh, translation ...? Anyone?" Councilman Thompson pleaded, his voice cracking.

Callie didn't take her eyes off Aris. "Siberia is about to make the rest of the world Siberia." She said, her voice dangerously calm. "Now shut up and let him work!"

Aris was undeterred. "And the plume?" Aris asked.

"Contained," ORACLE states. **"For now. However, the cryo-containment has structurally compromised the permafrost. The entire region is now seismically unstable."**

"Which I have already taken steps to mitigate," NYX's voice cut in, sharp and insubordinate. **"I have rerouted three arctic currents to flood the sub-dome cavity with high-salinity seawater. The resulting brine slush has stabilized the shattered permafrost and is actively neutralizing the methane hydrate deposits."**

Aris stared at the screen. A new icon pulsed: millions of gallons of highly saline seawater (very salty, semi-liquid) trapped beneath a dome of ice that was already starting to vaporize. It wasn't just a frozen methane bomb anymore — it was a frozen methane bomb sitting on a time-bomb of corrosive seawater. "You did what? You poured salt water into a rupturing permafrost cavity?" Aris yelled.

Aris rubbed his temples, hard. *This is fine*, he thought, a hysterical laugh bubbling just under the surface. *It's just the end of the world. Again.*