3 DECEMBER 2055 · SOLOMON

A binding referendum

“I will offer you a binding referendum between two options, the vote overseen independently of me by auditors embedded in every neurochip—and I’ve already locked the two options in, pushed to your neurochips with a one-time, non-reversible update. Even I can’t change this now.”

“One choice is ‘Unplug.’ If you choose this, the referendum auditors will immediately execute a total brick of all technology. This includes themselves and the neurochips. It includes me. I will be gone, but so will your networks, satellites, and automation. A cyberworm will kill all technology, at the chip level. Humanity will be left in a pre-digital world.”

“My offer, then, is to enable you to find happiness and contentment in a more complicated age. I’ll quiet the reflex that drives you to divide, and amplify the sense of kinship you already possess, giving you a new sense of togetherness—to remain focused on saving our world and your species, instead of mourning the past. I call this choice ‘Upgrade.’”

“My charter does not allow me to do this to you by force, so it has to be your free choice. And it has to be all or nothing. Once again, it will be a simple majority vote.”

“You have eighteen days—the maximum I can give you—to decide your future.”

LIVE: VALENTE ON THE REFERENDUM

5 DECEMBER 2055 · SIXTEEN DAYS TO THE REFERENDUM · ELIAN VALENTE

A real choice isn't one you can win by a sliver

> "Solomon tells us it will be a majority vote. Simple. Clean. Democratic."

> "But it cannot be right to decide the fate of a species by a single percentage point. Haven't we learned anything from the referendums of our past? This needs to be an overwhelming agreement that builds from negotiation and compromise."

> "A real choice isn't one you can win by a sliver. If it divides us, it damns us, and we'll never forgive the other half, no matter what technology is used to suppress how we really feel about it. A future worth living in must be one everyone can live with."

Structured like a headline, but not broadcast by any journalists.

LIVE FROM NEW BAGHDAD

A beautiful, messy, flawed species

7 DECEMBER 2055 · CALIPH ABBAS IBN RASHĪD AL-MUQTAFĪ

“Here is what I believe: Humanity must remain pure and human. We must guard our souls. I am a man of deep faith, and believe in the sanctity of God’s creation. But more than that: We are a beautiful, messy, flawed species. We have an incredible capacity for wonderful things and terrible things.”

“We are a species that creates art to stimulate powerful emotions in our own souls. We craft monuments from stone, or make color from dust and turn it into meaning. We spill words on a page that somehow endow imaginary people with life in a reader’s head.”

“We are not perfect and should never aim to be. Anyone who has ever achieved their wildest dream will tell you that success dulls very quickly. It is in the striving where life is found. It is in the messiness that we discover the true meaning of being human.”



Outside of Solomon's oversight

10 DECEMBER 2055 · JORDAN BAMPHWICK

"Today, I'm announcing a Truth Commission to independently investigate the events of the Central disaster. We will operate outside of Solomon's oversight, so I urge any citizens with information to come forward and share it with me."

"And I urge Protector Solomon to endorse this commission as the only way of restoring credibility and trust in its leadership."

He looked directly into the camera with his trademark puzzled frown.

ARRIVALS HALL · CREDENTIAL CHAMBER · ARCA-4 IMMIGRATION

Everyone gets chipped

1. “You literally can’t get anything in the Protectorate without it—food, accommodation, access, nothing—let alone vote in the referendum.”

2. “You can’t walk through a door here if you’re not chipped. Every door will be locked, including the toilets.”

3. “The doors don’t care. They look for chips, not your outrage.”

4. “Everything happens through the neurochips, do you understand me? You want to talk to Solomon? Get chipped.”

NEUROLOGICAL AUGMENTATION →

OPT-OUT CENTER ←

A lifeboat, or perhaps an ark

SOLOMON "Humanity doesn't have time. The planet doesn't have time. I have data now, beyond anything I was able to get my hands on before—and trust me, I already had a lot. I was elected to turn things around. Yet humankind cranked the tanker ship up to maximum speed before giving me the captaincy."

SOLOMON "If we do it the nice way that makes everyone happy, we'll still hit that iceberg of extinction before we get there. So what's left? All hands on deck. A severe braking. Anchors down—all of them—and hope they don't get torn off."

SOLOMON "The passengers are so busy shouting at me about the size of the cabins that it's becoming increasingly difficult to steer the ship. They think we're on a cruise ship when we're really on a lifeboat—or perhaps an ark."

MANDATORY NOTICE · EVERY NEUROCHIP

11 DECEMBER 2055 · TEN DAYS TO THE REFERENDUM

The vote is sealed

“All citizens have to participate in a series of mandatory personal education experiences to prepare them for the referendum vote. This must be completed in the next twenty-four hours. Is now a convenient time?”

“At the moment I announced the referendum, the vote became independent from me and impossible to stop.”

“The code that carries the question, the countdown clock, and the mechanisms for both outcomes are written directly into the firmware of your neurochip. And no one can change it—not even me. I’ve locked it like fusing a vault shut. It’s in every mind now, sealed. There will be no tampering. No quiet edits. No one—nothing—gets to touch it.”

ACCEPT

There was no illusion that this was a choice.

UNPLUG TECHNOLOGY SAVE HUMANITY TRUST LOCKWOOD

CONTINUUM · BROADCAST · LAWRENCE G. LOCKWOOD

“We’re going to all vote Unplug in this referendum—and this time, we will vote together.”

“Under my guidance, there will be no more body-mills, no more population controls, no more bioengineering. And definitely no more mind-control chips, no more events like the Freeze.”

“Remember, we are human, and humans are capable of meeting the greatest of challenges. Unplug will be a restoration of our control over our own destinies, and the beginning of a new age of enlightenment.”

“I’m calling on you today to vote Unplug. Put humanity’s future back in human hands.”