In a time of limited time and finances, I can't afford to be reading a series that's only half-interesting and the other half is obligatory. That division is pretty clear in Letter 44. While the outer space mission has been relatively engrossing, the travails of the Blades administration has read like the first draft of a Scandal episode, especially the whole first lady sleeping with a congressman to take the heat off the president scenario. That whole plan was so ill-conceived that it's almost ludicrous that Isobel feels indignation over Higgins' betrayal. Moreover, it's just disturbing that of all the things Isobel might have done, she resorted to that tactic first. Shouldn't we be in an age where a presumably strong, intelligent, and competent woman doesn't just sleep with a man to get what she wants? She can try to hide behind sexual confidence all she wants, claiming that their night together is "nothing to me," but she undermines herself by implying there are other things she can do to push Higgins around. Granted, her threats are vague and weightless ("You know who I am," she hisses), but if she has other options, why didn't she employ these first? You know, so she didn't cheat on her husband and further endanger his image at the same time? This kind of backroom intrigue just seems pointless next to the real problems going on in the issue. I mean, Blades has a real international relations disaster on his hands, now that the two surviving soldiers from Base Hurricane* gave his people enough clues to trace the nuclear attack to Germany. It's definitely a provocative situation: what does one do when attacked by a first-world, Western nation and supposed ally? I'm no political expert, but I'd suggest just letting the whole world know who's the perp here, especially since the German chancellor offers no real good reason why she went along with Carroll's plans. Her speech is full of resentment over the guilt her nation still suffers from the Nazi regime, but nuking another superpower without a basis doesn't seem like the best way to ameliorate that problem. Her secondary rationale is nearly as nonsensical as the first: "And that is why I agreed to destroy your President's weapons. When the aliens come, the United States will not be the only country ready to greet them." I'm not sure how setting back the U.S. ten years will somehow make Germany, much less the rest of the world, more prepared to face an alien invasion. But even her reasoning is airtight compared to Carroll's insane brand of logic. In response to her accusation that he just betrayed his country, he retorts, "I didn't betray my country. My country doesn't exist while Blades is in office." Apparently, not liking the person elected to office (one who refuses to let Carroll run the country behind his back) is enough justification for treachery. Later, he tries a more altruistic excuse: "This isn't about America. And, frankly, it's not about Germany. It's about the entire human race." But again, how does destroying billions of dollars' worth of alien-countering weaponry and armor help the human race? Isn't selling out the technology enough? That's the essential problem Isobel, Blades, Carroll, and pretty much every character in this whole series share: going for the extreme option when a subtler one will do (and would make for a better story). Even the Clarke people, who can't really afford to be making impulsive decisions in their position, continue to think messing with the aliens is an appropriate response when all it's done is land them in even deeper crap. The narrative result is even though our protagonists are in peril, you feel like the aliens wouldn't be out of line to execute the whole crew. Aside from the thinness of the plotting, I'm also tired of dealing with Alburquerque's art, which consistently falls short of his grand vision. When restricted to machinery and architecture, his scratchy lines and sense of scale make for some impressive imagery, like that of the Clarke seeming insignificant and primitive within the massive caverns of the Chandelier. But when it comes to characters, forget it. They have always looked ridiculous and caricaturized, as if Alburquerque thinks Soule is writing a farce** instead of a drama. The liver spots on Carroll's skin are distractingly out of control, and

Charlotte's huge watery eyes as she gets captured makes her look like a little girl who just watched her dog get shot. It's just too much, which fits the tone of the series just fine. Some Musings: * Who finally get names, an instant before they fade out. It's Washington and Curtis, FYI. ** In some, unintended ways, he is. The post Letter 44 #12 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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