

“So...this image is radar?”

“It’s an *imaging* radar,” said @ChuvaKurka, “and more than capable of resolving a metal object about eighty feet long.”

“So...”

“I found your Smerches,” @ChuvaKurka said. He sent her another image, a crop of the first. And there they were—you could almost make out the cab of the rocket launchers, the long striated axis of the payload trailer. There were four of them, out in a field a few miles southwest of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant, as close to smack dab under her centroid as you could believe. Google Maps showed the field as ragged, going back to nature; a few hundred yards from the Smerches there was a pin for the “Monument to Those Who Saved the World”—the Chornobyl Liquidators—and the Pripyat River forked and marshed up from its banks, left wild and untended. She imagined the Russian soldiers out there that morning, the power plant like a spacecraft out in the fog, smoking their Primas, dialing the coordinates into their fire control systems, covering while the rockets pistoned off into the sky, one after the other, dozen after dozen. Did they know who was on the other side—a family of four, running? Did they care? She would never know, because she would never know them, the men she found, by angle and cosine, by space-based radar, by Telegram video. Many if not most would be dead soon. She did not feel sorry for them. She wasn’t sure if she should. Where in her heart to place the war? What was it to her? Another life, another world entirely—she could leave it at will, quit the program, shut the laptop screen to reveal the tiny, undecorated cubicle she guarded like her own fortress. Close her eyes. Live her small, quiet life, forever in peace and calm, and with no incoming projectile ever meant for her—no one shooting at her, ever, a 9M55K submunition-dispensing cluster rocket, the purpose of which could never be to blast a piece of shrapnel through her childrens’ brains. All she had to do was close her eyes.

But there they were. Her Smerches, out in the field. Somewhere a trajectory linking them to her—not the ballistic curve they had used to kill those kids,