



THANATOS

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"Ship C5-Reaper has successfully made its landing on the surface of Planet Earth yesterday on the 25th hour," the Launch Director of Planet Eravix's only space station declared in the conference room.

All states of Eravix, known as Kepler-253b by inhabitants of planet Earth, had unitedly taken a grave decision. The forefathers, which is a reverent term for Earth dwellers, were to be exterminated. Earth has been regarded as a threat to itself and the solar system since the late 21st century. It's rather commendable that humans have somehow sustained the planet for six centuries, but as the chances of survival wane, Earth's attempt at finding alternate habitats had gotten aggressive.

Humans have seen three interplanetary wars in the last decade alone, and the planets who have fallen victims to Earth have urged Eravix to take action.

"It's rather unfortunate that we must say goodbye to our origin. After all, our heritage and ideologies have originated from Earth," remarked the head of another prominent state. "But there is no alternative. Relay our decision to Gliese 357, Kepler-1649, and Luyten-b."

The conference concluded then and there. Not a soul in the room was unbothered by the planning of Earth's imminent end. However, as the planet housing the most technologically and cognitively advanced individuals, Eravix had to be the one to issue such an edict.

Tas was the chief engineer behind the creation of Thanatos, the cyborg with a powerful AI tasked with the destruction of Earth. An avid reader of Earth's mythology, she named her cyborg after the Greek god of death, an action many found to be in poor taste. She thought it apt.

The administrator was sceptical about sending one cyborg to carry out the task of exterminating an entire planet but

sending many at once would raise alarm. Thanatos was the perfect solution.

He has been equipped with an arsenal, including cannons capable of wiping out cities. Earth has lax regulations on security to a dangerous degree due to their desperation for intergalactic currency, so when the C5-Reaper landed, Thanatos was perceived as an amiable intergalactic tourist due to his appearance. The cherry on top was his ability to lie and deceive.

It was planned that Thanatos would remain on Earth for three years. Scanning for optimum planting spots, gathering resources to assemble explosives, collecting rare elements from Earth – these were his chief missions.

Thanatos was programmed to send updates to Tas every ten seconds on Earth. She'd been looking through a script of their latest exchange. The camera mode was deactivated to reduce power consumption, so documentations were her only source of update.

"Seems like it will rain tomorrow," Thanatos said. "Will that bother you, Caretta?"

"Yes. I hate rain," replied the other party.

"I assumed as much. You can seek refuge in my vehicle, if you wish."

"I'd like that."

Tas furrowed her eyebrows. She didn't recall programming altruism into Thanatos. She inspected Thanatos's activity log, and deduced that it was necessary to assume the role of a good Samaritan to blend in.

A day or two passed before she personally checked his reports again. He had been gathering calcium ore from Türkiye, and sent a report of another interaction.

"Caretta, I suggest you do not touch anything in this vehicle. Some of my possessions are fragile."

Thanatos had allowed Caretta to follow him to Türkiye, all the way from Ecuador. Strange.

"Caretta, I specifically requested you not to touch the trinitrotoluene. You must not be so cavalier about explosive chemicals."

"Fine, I'll keep my hands off."

"Thank you."

Thanatos had shown a similar pattern of travelling to protect his cover, especially in decision-making simulations, so Tas shrugged it off without much thought.

Thanatos had collected all necessary elements except radium.

He was in Congo, excavating for uranium ores. The Earth-shattering explosives were all in place. Earth only had a week of existence.

Caretta was still with Thanatos. In his reports, he'd described her as a well-mannered yet adventurous girl in the prime of her life, with large blue eyes and hair of multiple colours.

She was unemployed, somewhat of a vagabond. Thanatos met her roaming the streets of Thailand, and after a conversation over dinner, she decided to accompany him on his mission. Thanatos claims her presence adds believability to his alibi.

The hour of departure drew near. Tas joined the launch team at the control station, awaiting Thanatos' report. This time, he used his audio-visual communication medium. Upon finishing his concise overview of accomplished tasks, Thanatos said, "If the explosives are detonated, my companion Caretta's chances of survival will be null. I request permission to bring Caretta to Eravix."

His request was immediately denied by the administration, considering the recent epidemic of viral diseases spreading among Earth-dwelling humans.

Thanatos refused to budge, "Either Caretta comes with me to Eravix, or I will immobilise the explosives and remain here on Earth permanently."

Tas and her team found themselves

dumbfounded. While AI can be programmed to form attachments, it was absent in Thanatos' directory. Yet, he was clearly attached to Caretta.

After a couple hours of troubleshooting, one of the programmers reported to Tas, "His programme has been tampered with since the field tests. The mission statement has been overwritten by a condition, but it doesn't look like any of us did it."

It had been overwritten by Thanatos himself thanks to his self-modifying code. Tas sighed and gave Thanatos the green light to bring Caretta to Eravix.

"Tighten health regulations at the landing zone, extract Caretta and Thanatos and quarantine them. We'll execute the human after temporarily disabling Thanatos."

Thanatos enabled the cameras in the C5-Reaper. In spite of their sorrow, Eravix inhabitants wished to witness the first time an exoplanet blew up into smithereens.

He manoeuvred his ship expertly, aware that his negotiation with headquarters about Caretta had taken valuable time off his hands. The explosion was set to take place in a matter of minutes.

He escaped the danger zone by a thin margin. "It's time, Caretta," he said.

His interpreter informed him that Caretta wished to be released from her seatbelt, and he obliged. Picking up the Siamese cat in his arms, he walked over to the porthole.

Planet Earth went up in flames, and Caretta meowed in approval.

Zabin Tazrin Nashita cancels plans in order to be productive and ends up laying in bed all day. Share her struggles at: zabintn@gmail.com