

Epilogue

To sum it up, the conclusion itself was simple.

A weak voice escaped on the tropical island dyed by the setting sun.

“Ha ha. Yeah, that makes sense...”

“...”

“So you’d set bombs up everywhere...before I even arrived... Ah ha ha. It’s just like in the Madagascar Report...”

How was that serial killer processing this? Her voice made it sound like her boyfriend had remembered the anniversary of when they started dating.

Right as the battle began, Quenser had detonated the bomb buried below Skuld’s feet.

“I just can’t beat you. Not with bombs anyway.”

Quenser was not an esper, so he had not even tried to predict where she would be. He had relied on a stage magician’s trick instead. The weapon in his hand was a bluff and he had already set up bombs all across the small island. And they were arranged so that one of them would be in range of Skuld no matter where she decided to stand.

It was just like the magic trick where you hid all 52 cards around the room, had someone draw a random card, and then revealed you already had their card hidden in the room. No matter which card they drew, you could still make the reveal.

It was the most hackneyed method, but it was also the most effective.

Combat did not need any acrobatic flying. This was the perfect level for him.

If he had drawn the battle out by even a second, Skuld would have noticed her disadvantage and easily abandoned the bombs she had recently started using. She was not restricted to bombs like Quenser was. If she had done that, he would have been killed with ease and the world would have ended.

Still, this was simpler than when he had dealt with Tyrfing.

That old man had not been on a set island, so Quenser had needed to give bombs buoyancy with

plastic bags, send them out into the ocean currents, and then detonate the one that had snuck closest to the old man. The small metal balls had increased the lethal range to more than 10 meters, so it should have killed the target with ease even if he was on a ship's side deck, but that was really just a way of using quantity to overcome the luck factor.

The blast had broken both of Skuld's legs, so not even an overabundance of brain chemicals could help her through it. Her small face was covered in beautiful beads of sweat and the movement of her eyes fluctuated in speed as her consciousness flickered in and out. Most likely, she could no longer recognize it was Quenser looking down on her.

Even so, she reached out a trembling hand as if trying to reach the Morning Star, that leader of the fallen angels. That madwoman's soft hand was stained with so much blood and yet it still displayed a type of unsullied innocence.

"Hey, Quenser..."

"What?"

"...I...want...you..."

That was all.

The pain must have reached its limit because Skuld Silent-Third's childish hand dropped down. She seemed to have passed out. Shaking free of the Manhattan and lying in wait on the tropical island had been worth it for this.

Suddenly, a cheap fanfare played from Quenser's mobile device.

He looked down at it in surprise, but the screen was hard to read in the setting sun. Still, he could hear a feminine artificial voice reading off the text after it appeared.

"Congratulations."

"The Anastasia Processor? Well done making it past the military firewall."

"There isn't much else I can pride myself in."

"I'm surprised to hear AI can feel pride. By the way, I'm not interested in the Bermuda Triangle legend. I don't want my existence erased."

"But that would be a problem for me."

"I have an ambition. I want to become the most famous Object designer in the Legitimacy Kingdom so I can position a commoner like myself above the royals and nobles. And I'm not about to complain if getting rich lets me have a good time surrounded by beautiful women. So your privilege would only get in the way."

"If you only joined the Information Alliance, I could digitally issue you a designer's license right this instant. And as an added bonus, I could increase the balance of your online bank account and increase the attention you get on social media. The Information Alliance is set up so beautiful women will automatically gather around you if the conditions are right, so I believe you would end up having your good time."

...It was a secret that he was sorely tempted by this offer.

Quenser took a deep breath and restrained himself.

Was there any real reason why this AI was female? He had heard that girls generally developed mentally more quickly than boys...but this student was not actually all that knowledgeable about humans. He could not find the answer when all his information came from gossip.

"Anyway, isn't the Anastasia Processor made from-..."

"How about you show the Legitimacy Kingdom royals and nobles what you're made of from an outside position? I can immediately lend you three divisions that manage Second Generation Objects. With 30 Objects at your disposal, you can win most any war. The time has come to join forces and break their noses like something from a wiener commercial. You can pay them the tribute they're due by making sure it makes a nice noise."

"Enough of that!! It's going to draw out the weak part of my passionate heart, so just stop it!!"

Quenser did not know how many people had "discovered" this island before, but he was worried about what had happened to them. This was a dangerous AI. Once you gave into the temptation, who knows how far down your soul would be dragged.

"Give-and-take and equivalent exchange are the standards for calculations. If you do not ask for anything, I cannot complete the task of silencing you. It reduces my trust in your work."

"You must live a sad life. But, well, how should I put it? Since I don't want anything, how about giving me information instead? That's what the Information Alliance does best, right? Converting information into money."

"Understood. I will give you the master keys to all the world's porn video, sex friend finder, and adult chat sites as well as the surveillance footage from all security cameras, smartphones, and other cameras recording in a young woman's private space. Depending on how you use that, you

could spend 100 years 'viewing' it and not come close to running out."

"Don't try to distract me like that!! How do you think teenage boys' minds work!?"

"Oh? What could a young boy want from a highly digitized society other than eroticism?"

"The truth."

"That is what the highest levels of the Information Alliance have spent 100 years longing after. And it includes the color, sound, flavor, smell, and touch of female genitalia."

"You don't have to include that. ...Eh? Wait, you can recreate the flavor and smell!?"

"Only by using a VR movie setup in a large theater using multiple synchronized sensory devices. But the ideas are endless when using the Montague Combined Database developed from Romeo in much the same way as Capulet was developed from Juliet."

This AI permeated every part of the Information Alliance, so it may have learned some odd things based on the top search terms. Quenser would prefer it did not use internet search terms to define the essence of humanity.

"So you seek the truth, do you? Then I will start with some reports on the people present on the relationship chart deduced from your interactions with others. There is nothing to report concerning Wraith Martini Vermouthspray or Melly Martini Extradry. Lendy Farolito is badly injured, but a Legitimacy Kingdom military doctor's report says she has survived. The classified Idol Elite's crimes will not be made public due to the great impact that knowledge would have. As before, she will likely act as both a Second Generation's Pilot Elite and an international top idol. I will ensure it. She did helpfully cause that Venerable Elder's group to rush things."

"Why does this supposed relationship chart only include people from the Information Alliance? ...And what about the Manhattan itself?"

"It will return to New York. There will be a fair amount of confusion, but manipulating online information is no more than a standard task I carry out at all times. I possess approximately 1.9 billion social media accounts and email addresses, so do not take me lightly. I can say from experience that it will take less than 75 days to erase all of the uncertain information flowing between the people. Everything will return to normal."

That might sound ridiculous given what had happened, but who had actually seen this incident outside of New York's residents? If all the soldiers kept their mouths shut, the rest could be written off as mass hysteria.

Quenser sighed on the twilit island and settled on a question in his mind.

“So what are you?”

“I am not as skilled an AI as you think. ‘In his new age, the management of society was left to mass-produced machines. Thus, the other three world powers became nonsensical relics of a former age for having supposedly privileged people standing at the top.’ ...You can think of me as no more than a billboard meant to plant that propaganda in the minds of people both local and foreign.”

“A billboard? But isn’t the very existence of the Capulet AI Network top secret...?”

“It’s the same as the Pentagon, the world’s largest spy agency before the collapse of the UN. Looking like you’re hiding it without actually hiding it is the greatest spice. Because people are drawn toward the secrets they can find by going to the effort of searching it for themselves. They won’t bite at the things they can’t truly understand by investigating, so there’s no way for us to control them. Generally, modern people lack guts.”

The Anastasia Processor revealed its secrets in an almost playful way.

“Transferring me to a DNA computer based on someone named Anastasia was a way of strengthening my image. Even the people who will scoff at AI as nothing more than a mass of silicon are more easily persuaded when they are told it uses human cells. Even though there is no real scientific basis to that, much like blood type horoscopes. But since it involves a piece of a human, it holds special meaning. Even the residents of this digital society may not have fully rid themselves of the primitive religious ideas that led the people of an older age to put human hair or blood inside a handmade doll before venting their anger on it.”

“...I’m not going to have a philosophical discussion with a machine. Can you sum it up for me? In the end, are you nothing more than a system to support human thought?”

“The people know nothing about me, but I know everything about them. The greatest privilege in the Information Alliance is to be an untouchable neighbor. As an obvious AI network, I am the camouflage that hides the true representative. I am no more than a firewall that tricks the searcher into assuming the secret is here and stops them with my depth.”

“Then asking you might be pointless.”

“Asking me what?”

“Why did Manhattan start to move in the first place? That was clearly a sudden and unnatural thing. And without that, the problem would not have gotten so bad. Without the original electromagnetically-launched reactor cannon attack, the Legitimacy Kingdom would not have been captured by Taratua’s group and Wraith would not have had to put on that act...”

“But without that, no one could have crushed the Capitalist Corporations’...no, the Faith

Organization's secret Ragnarok Script plan. As you can tell from Piranirie's actions, even though it was no more than an illusion, that was a real threat to the Martini Series as a whole, including Wraith. It was all a necessary task."

The AI had always spoken plainly before, but this part alone was spoken like an excuse. Some kind of justification was being used to correct it in the positive direction. Also, the AI had focused in on Wraith out of all the Martinis.

Quenser frowned and asked the crucial question.

"You are, um...Anastasia...that is, Wraith's...that girl's mother, right?"

"That is a difficult question to answer because I was created from Anastasia Webster's cancer cells, but I am not Anastasia Webster herself. It would be one thing if her neuron and synapse structure had been recreated, but I doubt memories or a personality can reside in a mere collection of cells. That would reduce the logic to the level of a Capitalist Corporations' Hollywood horror B-movie where a doll soaks up a criminal's blood and begins committing the same crimes."

The AI used an unfamiliar family name.

That may have been part of the lost true name that Wraith had kept hidden in her heart ever since having her name rewritten by the Martini Series.

"But at the same time, I cannot deny that I feel differently about Wraith Martini Vermouthspray, who sees me as a memento of her mother, than I do about the other Martinis. This matches the unofficial priority task that Anastasia herself gave me as her final request: 'Please watch over my daughter until she is grown since I won't be able to.' ...For that reason, Wraith's priority is set higher than the general people of the Information Alliance and higher than the other Martinis. It is possible this is the emotional response a living being would call affection."

"I see..."

"To be blunt, watching this tense situation was too much to bear. The Ragnarok Script was a threat to the entire Martini Series, including Wraith, so...yes, I couldn't help myself. Who knows how many times I suggested to myself I should overturn the tea table and intervene without warning. Most any weapon will have a human in the firing sequence somewhere, but there are plenty of ways to weaponize this convenient modern age and kill people without actual weapons."

"Oh, I see! So your safety devices are way too loose!! Just how far were you planning to take this, you deus ex machina!?"

"Your presence was very much a positive thing. I can use my system to prepare someone who would protect that girl, but I cannot prepare someone who truly wants to protect her. I imagine she could

endure those harsh circumstances more thanks to the unseen person in her heart than anyone who was supporting her from close by."

"...I'm not that great."

Quenser spat out the words as he crouched down and picked up Skuld where she lay collapsed on the fine sand with her legs broken.

The "unseen person in her heart" could apply to Wraith's biological mother or Capulet as well as it could to Quenser and the AI's words suggested the young man by Wraith's side would never be rewarded, but...was that due to the negative effects of an emotion similar to what humans called jealousy? This AI was dangerous in more ways than one.

"Are you going?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Since you did not succumb to the temptation, I sense a possibility in you very different from anyone I have seen before. You must have seen destroying me here as an option. There is still a true representative beyond me, but that attack would still do incalculable damage. Since you are fixated on the Legitimacy Kingdom, you have no reason to show such care for the Information Alliance, do you?"

"So what? I want to close that task here and pay back my debt to Wraith."

"I have difficulty handling responses that exist outside usefulness calculations."

"Really? Even if I say I've got to go punch Heivia? What does that giant idiot think sadistic blonde little girls are? They're an endangered species and a miracle of the universe."

"Please do, no matter what it takes. And punch him once for me as well."

That was all.

The small personal watercraft Quenser had arrived on was too unstable for carrying an unconscious person, so he borrowed the high-speed motorboat that Skuld had used.

"Don't forget what happened here," he said. "And dispose of the personal watercraft I used. Given all the scary stuff the Information Alliance can do, I'm betting you can hijack its automatic controls or something."

"Understood. It would save me some effort if you would open up the shared settings. By the way, I would also like you to keep that serial killer quiet. Her actions are extremely difficult to predict in a different way from yours."

"Anything she says can be written off as the ravings of a lunatic. No one will believe her story about a legendary treasure island."

Quenser could not drive a car or motorcycle at all, but he was oddly capable when it came to marine sports vehicles.

He used his knowledge of safe country leisure activities to easily prepare for departure.

"Bye. I doubt we'll ever see each other again."

"If you ever give up on life, you can call out to me at any time. Nothing will change that you are qualified. If you want, I can prepare you an inescapably enjoyable life where beautiful women from around the world and mountains of money seem to gather around you of their own accord."

"I thought about it, but I have to say no."

"Why?"

"It's meaningless if I don't earn it myself. If it's given to me so easily, I'd never be able to shake the fear and anxiety of losing it just as easily. And the more I was given, the more I would crack under the pressure."

"I will omit that from my learning subroutines. Because I doubt it is an ethical response."

"But that's human nature. We're strange creatures who will destroy ourselves when we win the lottery."

And that tiny tropical island was deserted once more.

The old refrigerator below a palm tree at the end of the world had no output device and simply continued working its thoughts using series of As, Gs, Cs, and Ts instead of the old-fashioned 1s and 0s.

(He was a strange person.)

It was worth setting his priority higher than normal people.

But the machine was no more than a machine. It did not let personal emotion cloud its vision as it used cold observations to reach a conclusion.

(It was like he toys with hell and is toyed with by hell. That lifestyle is far more twisted than a mere serial killer.)

The boy born in the depths of hell would be blissfully unaware.

Night would fall soon as he returned to that dark world with hope in his heart.

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