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Mr. Brazner

Imaginary Worlds

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(Chapter 3.5) **The Computer**

“The I.F. needs you to extend the existing models that the computer uses for analyzing the students.”

“Sir, I’m not quite sure what you mean, the mainframe can already think for itself and gives us evaluations of each of the people that sign onto the system.”

“I can’t go into much detail, but we’ll just say that there is a *special* student that will be arriving here shortly, and the current system is insufficient for our purposes.”

“Quite frankly sir, the system is as advanced as it can get. It’s even writing sub-routines and entire scripts for itself.”

“Yes, Leighton, I’m well aware of that—”

“Then there is noth—”

“The computer doesn’t break the rules yet.”

“Sir, what you ask would give us no control over the machine at all. The limits that are in place now are meant to protect the students from snapping. We can’t use a soldier who isn’t willing to do his job.”

“Just make whatever changes you have to. I don’t care what it does to the *other* students. If anyone can fix it, you can. Sometimes I think you know that machine better than it knows itself.”

Leigh had gotten his job with the I.F. after passing through the same training every one of the other students at battle school had endured. He knew how far he could push the computer. He had discovered its limits, and manipulated it, even more than the teacher's expected anyone to. He used it to change the dynamics of the other armies, and it took the teacher's years to find out who it was.

Leigh was not suited for leadership though, that was his brother's specialty. Neil had always been the one to take control by being the best physically, and he gained respect because he was respectful. Leigh, on the other hand, didn't even want the respect of his peers. He wanted to be the one that nobody remembered, the one that nobody cared about—it allowed him to better go about his business of sabotage. Neil knew, but turned a blind eye to it because even he recognized its worth, and its dangers.

By the time the teachers found out that Leigh was controlling the entire school, it was too late, they couldn't use him as a leader. He was too deceptive, too far under the shadow of technology. He had no respect, only the rumor that if you got on his bad side, that you would not be safe. The kids at school weren't stupid. They suspected Leigh, but they could never prove it, nor did they want to try.

The I.F. had promised Leigh a life of safety, and one in which he could do what he did best, manipulating machines and other people, behind the scenes. Leigh knew that it was just a ploy to keep him on their side. The I.F. knew that he would be problematic if he was released or put in command on the battlefield. It could have a whole army of deserters, betrayers, or worse if Leigh was left to his own means. Leigh decided that it didn't matter if it was a trick, a limit on his power. He got to do what he enjoyed, and they provided him with the best environment, equipment, and opportunity to do it.

This new assignment was somewhat of a surprise, but with all the chatter about the immediate threat of the Third Invasion, Leigh knew that the I.F. was taking any means to their end of survival. He didn't necessarily agree with their logic, but Leigh hadn't been challenged in quite some time, and so he began working on the modifications.

Instead of solely adding patterns and code to the existing machine, he decided it would be far superior if it were actually two different entities completely: one predictable and "law-abiding," the other a demon that lived by no rules. The simple games were easy to revise. For the tactical games, the computer could just slow time for the user, randomly deplete energy or weapon supplies, come in far superior numbers, use illegal tactics, and generally just have an "I Win" button. Leigh finished these algorithms fairly quickly, and he was only doing it because he had to.

The psychological games, however, were much more intriguing. How could they cheat? In the mind of the normal person, there would be no reason for this kind of game to be cheating at all.

"I don't know how it's possible for a game that studies its users and presents them with challenges to cheat. It's already unfair enough that the Giant's Drink is rigged. How can it get any worse?"

Leigh knew that his co-worker Bill had no grasp on abstract thinking. "Well, what is the goal of such games?"

"I don't know," Bill thought, "I guess the computer's goal is to stretch the limits of its users. Push them as far as they are willing to go."

Leigh was toying with Bill now. He already had the answer he was looking for. "And what information is the machine provided with?"

“Well, whatever the person does within the context of all the games. What does that have to do with anything?”

You fool. “Never mind,” Leigh replied. It has everything to do with the training. What if the computer was able to access and interpret all the files about its subjects on Earth, their stats in the battleroom? What if it could access and predict its subject’s thoughts and feelings? What if it could affect them? Control them? Leigh had found the answer he was looking for, and began working on it immediately.

By the time Ender reached the school, Leigh had finished his job. The program would be able to keep Ender isolated, trapped in its perplexities. He didn’t know whether what he felt was a sense of completed duty, or a sense of moral betrayal, but he knew he won the challenge, and he loved himself for it.