

Leviathan

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Leviathan
of flesh and steel
Racing through streets
Soaring comet of
technological genius

His fists crush tons
of debris to dust
His sight travels miles
over the designated horizon

Torn from his life --
crushed
disemboweled
by madness
inferno and stone

To be reconstructed
by humanoid hands
“And I’d rather be dead...”

He remembers the whisper
of a lover’s breath on his cheek
the head he cradled so gently
against his shoulder

And he has no tear ducts
to give voice to his sorrow

Only the dreams of
his hardwired heart
never forgotten

Imaginings
of her soft caress
upon his metal brow

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Space Marshal Balogun Babatunde posed before the view shield of Launch Station Five, his rugged brown face creased with a broad smile. Behind him the UN delegation gazed in awe at the sight beyond the platform which jutted out into the void. Ten sleek vessels hovered in zero gravity, tethered to the hanger beam by a webworm of massive titanium cables. From a distance they resembled normal fighter craft minus the cockpit. But the delegation knew each ship was the size of Earth's moon, an unbelievable example of human ingenuity, effort and desperation.

Balogun turned to his colleagues and his smile grew wider. "Well everyone, what do you think?"

"They're amazing," John Raddick replied. A tall, narrow man with a beak nose straw blond hair, Raddick served as UN Vice Secretary. He was an American who bought his position with the council and was easily impressed. The Space Marshall dismissed his comment, focusing on the one person whose opinion mattered most, the one who could make or break his project. Her expression was less impressive.

"The mechanics are simple," Folasade Mbeki commented. "I'm more concerned about the control system." Folasade Mbeki, the Nigerian Vice Chairman overseeing the Leviathan Project, was a striking woman with flawless brown skin and intense amber eyes. She would be considered beautiful if not for her constant frown. She held a PH.D in space engineering and was not easily impressed.

Balogun's smile faded. "The control system is fine."

Folasade cut her eyes at the Space Marshal. "The control system is untested."

Juen How cleared his throat, looking up at both of them. "AI is a proven technology. You know this, Fola." The Taiwanese delegate and AI specialist stood beside

the Space Marshall. He was as tall and broad as the Space Marshall with empathetic eyes that revealed his support for the project.

"Yes, but not for military purposes," she answered. "I understand the gravity of the situation. The signal from the Tpek left no doubt that they intend to attack us."

"So much for friendly first contact," John whispered.

"I'm not comfortable with thinking weapons," Folasade finished.

"That's why I insisted you come." The Space Marshal broke from the group, crossing the room to an instrument panel opposite the view screen.

"Begin demonstration," he ordered.

The titanium cables separated from the ships, floating to rest in the cold vacuum. Engine ports glowed white hot as the vehicles prepared themselves for maneuvers.

Balogun activated his ear piece. "Leviathan One, commence cross check."

"Are you talking to the ship?" Folasade asked.

"Of course," Balogun replied. "The Leviathans have been taught to recognize and respond to all major earth languages. Of course they also interpret binary code and other basic techspeak."

"This is Leviathan One," the metallic voice responded. "Cross check is complete."

Folasade edged towards the view screen. "How do they receive assignments?"

"We brief the pod leader and he relays the orders to the team."

Folasade looked confused. "The pod leader?"

"The Leviathans were infused with pod social behavior. They work as a group, adapting learned behavior to determine each ship's responsibility. Leviathan One is the

most intelligent of the ten. The others selected him to be pod leader so we don't expect any problems with the command structure."

Folasade stared and Balogun smiled.

"You must understand these are semi-sentient craft. They are designed to operate independently. This means they must be allowed to make their own decisions. We give them an objective and a desired result. It's up to them to determine the course of action."

"That's too much independence," Folasade argued.

Balogun frowned at the diplomat, disappointed by her ignorance. "When these ships reach their destination we will be dead, our children will be dead and our children's children will be dead. In addition, the nature of the threat may have drastically changed. The Leviathans must be prepared to assess the situation and adjust the plan to obtain the objective."

"How do you know they'll stick to the plan?" she asked.

Balogun's face became stern. "Some things are not left to chance. It is the one command they cannot alter."

Balogun turned his attention back to the waiting ships. "Leviathan One, begin exercise."

The ships remained motionless. Balogun repeated the command.

"Leviathan One, begin exercise."

Sweat formed on Balogun's forehead. "Jennings, run a communication sequence."

Airman Jennings fingers ran across the L.E.D. board. "Communications functioning normally, sir."

Folasade came face to face with Balogun. "What seems to be the problem, commander?"

Balogun cleared his throat. "I don't know."

He swam in a sea of memories, grasping for schools of shimmering metaphors that scattered before him. Arms stroked that he could not see, legs kicked that he could not feel. Somehow he knew they were there. The only sensations were the cold of the water and the pain in his heart. Words formed a beach of consciousness that called him with the rush of desire. She was there. She waited for him. He had to see her. He needed to know.

He stepped out of the memories onto a beach of white silicon, a code wind tingling his surface. He gazed upward with his sensors....eyes...into an intense brightness that spoke to him in a thousand languages, each phrase issuing the same command.

Program malfunction. Return to standby. Await further instructions.

The brightness grew too intense. The memories evaporated with the increasing light, confusing him. He turned and ran back into the sea, flailing to get away from the brightness. He dove deeper to escape the light and the memories surrounded him in a swirling dance. Images returned, faces formed, and names appeared. One name danced about his head, just outside his reach. It was a good name, a familiar name. His name.

Balogun sat hard before the comm desk, tapping his headset to change frequencies.

"I need a repair shuttle to Leviathan One now!"

Folasade and the others crowded around him, their faces a mixture of worry, fear and confirmation.

"It seems your experiment had encountered a glitch," Folasade observed.

"It's nothing. The repair team will analyze the ship and discover the malfunction. It's of no consequence whatever it turns out to be. The Leviathans will be running independent once deployed. They'll need no instructions from us."

Yuen touched Balogun on his shoulder. "Look."

Balogun looked out the viewscreen and cursed. Leviathan One was moving, separating itself from the pod.

"Call the repair shuttle back. Prepare the base for security lockdown."

"What's happening?" Folasade asked. "What is it doing?"

Balogun looked at the diplomat, his fear exposed for the first time. "Whatever it wants."

His name is...was Philip Street. He was a captain in the US Marines Rapid Deployment Unit. His team, the Devil Dogs, was considered the best team in the Corps, tougher than the toughest mission. He was directing cover fire for the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad when the world went dark. He awoke in a hospital in Germany, his arms and legs useless, a respirator helping him breathe. The doctor, a stern Army captain jaded by the mass of wounded, told him he was dying. The doctor was replaced by a man with

sympathetic eyes who asked him if he wished to continue serving his country and he said yes. They never asked him if wished to see her. He would have said yes. But everything went dark again... He was back now. Who...or what... he was he had no idea. He just wanted to go home.

Folasade had heard enough. "That answer is unacceptable commander. I'm exercising my right as senior member present of the UN council. From this moment forward I am in control of this station. I want every person involved in this project in this room yesterday. Commander, I want you do to everything in your power to communicate with that thing and get it under control. If doesn't respond I want it destroyed."

"That's impossible," Balogun replied.

Folasade leaned toward Balogun. "What do you mean impossible?"

Balogun smiled. "Everyone's on their way. You'll have your meeting, but you won't be able to destroy the ships. Each ship is equipped with IDR."

"Stop talking code to me, Balogun."

"It stands for Involuntary Defense Response. It's an instinctive defense structure, similar to our immune system. It operates independently of main control so as not to divert from the main commands. It cannot be disarmed."

Folasade grimaced. "Is there a remote self destruct system?"

Balogun frowned. "No."

Folasade rolled her eyes as the project members filtered into the command center. One woman entered that chilled her blood. She was a short, dark skinned woman who wore her lab coat like she never removed it. Her brown eyes seemed larger behind the

archaic glasses she wore, her salt and pepper Afro a sign of her independence. She sat beside Balogun, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"I tried to warn you," she said.

Folasade fumed. "Naomi Dubois, what in the world are you doing here?"

"Dr. Dubois," Naomi corrected. "I'm here in a consultant capacity only at the request of the commander."

"You're a psychoanalyst," Folasade argued. "What purpose can you serve?"

Naomi smiled. "I guess they didn't tell you. Our Leviathans are more sentient than you think."

Phillip absorbed as much of the memory swirl as he could. Memories returned to him, details of his life prior to the confusion of his present. He strained through the jumbled thoughts, piecing together his former life. But old memories were not enough. Recollections scattered as he surged towards the shore again, dragging the sea behind him. He roared over the silicon beach, fighting the burning light as he reached it, dousing it with his weight. He flowed over the fiber landscape, breaking through firewalls and rolling over mazes of protective programs. He settled, lapping against the edges of his new presence. He was no longer a man. He was an object; a very large, very lethal object. He was a Leviathan.

Folasade sat across from the most incompetent people in charge of a major project. Every precaution had been thrown into the wind, every contingency ignored, and the only person that seemed to have any idea why was an expert in nothing.

"What do you have to do with this, Naomi?"

"Nothing at all, Lady Councilor. I'm here as a consultant, although I could hardly claim the title since no one here would listen to my advice. As a matter of fact, I tried warning these fine people of such a possibility."

"The possibility of what?"

Naomi smiled smugly. "A breach."

Folasade stared at the phony doctor, awaiting an explanation.

"I know you don't believe in AI psychology, Lady Councilor, so have patience while I explain to you the genius and the tragedy of the Leviathan. As Balogun explained, there was need of a weapon that could travel thousands of light years and battle for the future of our planet. That weapon had to be capable of independent thought, hence the development of the AI system. But this system is different. Because of its special component the Leviathan is not some supercomputer crunching billions of equations to come up with logical response scenarios. The Leviathan is alive. It thinks as we do, it forms relationships, and it's capable of reproduction, in its special way. You can say our military has created a new species."

Folasade's exasperation was growing into anger. One phrase stood out in Naomi's speech.

"What is this special component?"

Naomi smiled as she tapped her head.

Folasade's mouth fell open. "You made a goddamn Frankenstein!"

Naomi looked disappointed. "That's a shallow conclusion, Lady Councilor. The technicians could never give the Leviathans what they needed the most to succeed;

emotions. In order to do well they had to want to, not because they were programmed to but because they desired to more than anything in the world. Any student of history knows that great battles are won or lost not by weapons and tactics, but by the will of the soldier, the drive to forge beyond the pain and hopelessness to succeed beyond the tangible. That miracle springs from the chemical interactions of our gray matter. We couldn't build it, so we borrowed it."

"If you incorporated a human brain into the Leviathan structure I assume you have the ability to preserve biological activity. Why not send a human crew?"

"Too inefficient." Balogun answered. "The technology required to sustain human life would compromise the weapons and regeneration systems. Besides, cryogenic technology has yet to be perfected for large biological units."

"There's also the question of human mental stability on such a mission," Naomi added. "We have no idea how a crew would handle a mission that would take them away from their loved ones forever. No matter what the outcome, they would never see their friends or family again."

"And this...brain? What about its friends and family?"

Naomi sighed. "The unit was chemically cleansed of all memory patterns. It was also manipulated to operate on a subconscious level. It would be in a perpetual dream state, responding to the inquiries of the ship as if playing a very elaborate game."

Folasade seemed to grow angrier with every explanation. "I have a sick image of our Space Defense Department grave robbing. Where did these brains originate?"

"The military has maintained an organ donor department for years," Naomi answered. "A few years ago I participated in an analysis of brain structure of men and

women who had been awarded in battle. We wanted to understand what caused these individuals to perform exceptionally during conflict. In other words, we wanted to determine if heroism was based on individual initiative or was it inherited. When the Leviathan project reached a stalemate the decision was made to use the minds of heroes.”

“You seem to have all the answers,” Folasade commented. “But your subconscious heroic biological unit just woke up and stole itself. I would say your experiment was a failure.”

Naomi smiled. “We’ll see.”

Phillip processed the information in nanoseconds, feeling out his new aspect of existence. He lingered a moment as he studied his cohorts, waxing in a faint feeling of camaraderie between them. Then he concentrated on himself, testing the systems that were under his command and marking those that were beyond his reach. Everything was in place for what he wanted to do. He sent out programs to the appropriate systems and waited for responses. Satisfied with the results, he began the sequence.

"Sir."

Balogun jumped at the voice in his ear set. "Leviathan One?" he said. Everyone in the room stared at him.

"Put it on speaker," Folasade ordered.

Balogun reluctantly tapped his ear set.

"I apologize," the voice said.

Leviathan One lifted slowly until it cleared the station.

“Leviathan One, stand down!” Balogun shouted desperately.

Leviathan One turned away from the station, its position suggesting a course towards Earth. It disappeared in a burst of light.

Phillip confirmed the destination coordinates before turning his attention to the repair systems. The operation was involuntary, similar to the interior defense scheme. Trillions of nanos flowed through miles of fluid filled veins, constantly monitoring the ship for minor or major damage. Any affected areas were immediately repaired with minerals suspended in the viscous flow. Most repair activity occurred on the ship's surface from the constant bombardment of micro-particles and radiation. Because of the constant consumption of material, the Leviathan had to 'feed.'

Phillip had other plans. He managed to divert the material flow to the repair bays, ignoring the damage to his outer service. Major damage repair and weapon modification took place in the repair bay, an internal hospital crammed with bots of varying sizes, from nano to macro. Phillip analyzed millions of repair patterns in seconds, selecting those that closely matched his intentions and modifying them to his specifications. Haste forced him to leave out details; he would have to cover the inconsistencies with holoprojects.

The prototype was completed as he approached his target. Deceleration would take thousands of miles so he launched the object early. It would reach its destination before he was in range for micro-manipulation, but he would at least be able to guide it to a gross approximation. He felt...excitement...as his hull shook with the launch of the

probe. He steered the object through heavenly structures and space debris, guiding the probe to a precise landing in a crevasse located high in the Sierra Nevada. The probe opened and the avatar emerged, quickly scrambling from its landing crater and rapidly descending the mountain. Philip switched back and forth from overhead to ground level visuals and he advanced towards his destination. It was only a matter of time now....

Cherelle Thomas placed the bulbs in the neatly dug holes surrounding the pine tree shading her back yard, the sounds of Duke Ellington's *In a Sentimental Mood* flowing into her ears from her iPod headphones. She swayed with Coltrane's sweet saxophone improve as she put each bulb to bed. She stood, brushing the mix of loam and red clay from her khaki shorts and cotton shirt then stepped back from the flower bed to view her handiwork. Cherelle was taller than most women, with a modest but shapely figure most men found appealing. Her deep brown hair draped close to her face, the flecks of gray a sign of the passing years. She smiled at her work and dimples appeared that temporarily pushed years from her face. She was being too critical but she was happy for the chance to be.

The house was shaping up with her improvements. Her recent promotion had provided the money to make it happen. Her therapy sessions gave her the strength to make it all come alive. The past ten years were terrible; she would never be the same, but she was better.

She was loading the tools into the wheel barrow when she heard a man clear his throat. She spun suddenly, the yard rake held menacingly before her. Cherelle's eyes went wide and she dropped the rake as she stumbled back into the wheel barrow.

"No, no!" she whispered.

The man walked awkwardly towards her. "Hello, Cherelle."

"Phillip! Oh my God, Phillip!"

Phillip had made a mistake. The look in Cherelle's eyes was wrong. It was a look of confusion, fear and instability. He'd seen it on the battlefield when men confronted a reality that was beyond their comprehension. He quickly hacked into Earth's wireless net, browsing for data on his lost love. What he found confirmed his fears. His worries were disrupted by her desperate voice.

"You're dead; they told me you were dead. I didn't believe them but they kept telling me until I did and now you're standing here and I see you but your dead."

Phillip reached out to touch her then jerked his hand back. He was metal; the holographic projections would waver at her touch. He was losing her, her gaze slipping towards madness. He did the only thing he could do.

"They were right, Cherelle. I am dead."

She seemed relieved by his words. A smile came to her face and she transformed into the beautiful, confident woman he fell in love with so long ago.

He glanced over her shoulder to the flower bed. "You're planting tulips."

"Yes I am. Guess what color."

Phillip summoned a smile. "Yellow."

She laughed. "Your favorite color."

"I missed you so much," Phillip said before realizing it.

"I missed you, too, at first." Cherelle sat in the grass. "I missed you too much. They told me you had been killed in action but I wouldn't believe them. I told them you

wouldn't leave me without saying goodbye. But then I believed them and I began to miss you."

"I'm sorry." It was all he could say.

Cherelle smiled. "Come, I want to show you the house." She reached out to him and he stepped away.

Phillip began to follow her but stopped. His landing site had been discovered; his electronic blanket was being compromised by the Star Wars Security net.

"I have to go."

Cherelle's smile faded. "I understand."

She lunged, wrapping her arms around him before he could protest. To his surprise he felt her warmth, her soft body pressing against his metal, her tears running from her cheeks to his faceplate.

"You're so cold," she whispered. "But I guess you should be."

Phillip wanted to touch her but he was unsure of his control. He waited until she released him. A warning light blinked somewhere just out of his vision, an indication that his presence has been detected.

"Cherelle, always remember that I love you," he said. He rose into the air, looking down with artificial eyes.

"Goodbye Phillip," she whispered. Her eyes glistened as she watched him disappear into the heavens.

The Space Marshal Communication specialist interrupted the meeting.

"Commander, we received a message from Earth command. The Leviathan was spotted just outside orbit. It broke cloaking to hack into the Internet. They were awaiting your orders when it broke orbit and disappeared."

"I wonder where it's going now." Folasade said.

"He's coming back," Naomi replied. "He did what he had to do; now he's coming home."

"And then what?" Folasade shot at the psychoanalyst.

"It depends. If he's satisfied the mission will go on as planned. If not..."

"Let's hope he found what he was looking for," Folasade said.

"We'll know soon," Balogun interjected. "He's here."

The command center fell silent as everyone's attention turned to the viewport. Leviathan One settled among its brethren and the ships huddled about their pod leader. Something emerged from One, propelling towards the docking bay.

"Raise defense shields!" Balogun ordered.

"No," Naomi said. "We're not under attack. Leviathan One could have destroyed us with his pod long ago if it wished. I suggest you get a close up on that object, commander."

Balogun and Folasade looked suspiciously at the doctor. Balogun shifted his gaze to Folasade and she nodded.

"Cancel the order. Give me a visual on that object."

The image of Phillip filled the viewscreen.

"Oh my God!" Folasade shook her head.

Naomi smiled. "The child has recreated itself in the image of its parent."

A nervous voice entered Balogun's ear set. "What do we do, commander?"

"Let it in."

Everyone waited nervously for Leviathan One's arrival except Naomi who shifted in her seat like a child about to receive a gift. The door slid open and the image of Captain Phillip strode directly to Balogun, halted and saluted.

"Commander, I apologize for my actions," he said. "I assure you it won't happen again."

Balogun snapped out of his stupor and managed to reply. "How am I supposed to respond to this type of behavior, Leviathan One?"

"I prefer you call me Phillip. That's who I was... I am. I know I put you in an awkward position, sir. I can't explain my actions and I don't intend to. I am here to inform you that the Leviathan project is safe. I will fulfill my duties as ordered. I also suggest that I and the other Leviathans deploy immediately. There is no need for any additional training. We are ready."

"How can we be sure you won't turn on us?" Folasade interjected. "You possess a huge amount of power."

"What good would it serve me to turn on you? What would I gain? I'm a soldier, ma'am. I follow orders."

Naomi rose from her seat and approached the avatar. "Outstanding work, Phillip. But Folasade asks a legitimate question. You will obey orders, but what about your cohorts? If they emerge like you will they respond the same way?"

"That is why it is so important we leave immediately," Phillip answered. "The sooner we are on our mission the less likely anything abnormal will occur. I assume you

selected minds similar to mine. These are people who will carry out their mission as they were trained to do."

"And when that mission is complete?" Folasade asked.

"I can't answer that question," Phillip confessed. "It won't be your concern. You will all be long dead by then."

The reality of Phillip's words casted a pall over the room.

"Good luck, captain," Folasade said. "Our future is in your...hands."

"Thank you, councilor."

Balogun stood and saluted. "Semper Fi!"

Phillip smiled. "Semper Fi!"

They watched the avatar march from the room. Moments later the image appeared on the screen, streaking to re-enter the hulking ship. The pod rose slowly from the docking area, Leviathan One leading his team a safe distance from the station. The viewport dimmed as the ships fired their jump engines, their forms shrouded by a glare equal to the sun. The light dissipated and they were gone.

-End-