

Alternative Access

by Bryan Schuder

"You know... I really wish you would just come into my office and give me ANY good news. I'd even take small talk at this point. For example, how's your mate? How are your spawn doing in academy?"

"My mate is fine. And my spawn are just starting academy."

"Well, at least we started this meeting on a good note."

"... .."

"You may proceed."

"Sir, in the latest reports the humans have managed to acquire a small fleet of construction vehicles."

"Construction vehicles? Interesting. And very troubling. As the question always is... How?"

"Well... Umm, I-"

"One step at a time. Start from the beginning."

"Late last night, it seems a small human force went after a remote abandoned construction yard. Detailed here."

"Okay. ... There hasn't been any activity there in a few years. We placed autonomous bipedal drones there for monitoring purposes, since it was deemed a very low risk target."

"Yes. It was by your order to move suppression forces to more important areas."

"I know. I thought my decisions to be wise, but recent events have brought those into question. So, why were we not informed of this trespassing until much later? Our bipedal drones have decent sensors and radio transmitters."

"Their transmitters were jammed."

"... If they were jammed, they wouldn't have reported their mandatory status update-"

"Which they did."

" ... "

"Sort of."

"I'm reluctantly listening."

"It seems the humans guided the AI to use a particular frequency that doesn't propagate well due to the geography of the area. Our reporting station nearby still could receive it well enough to be accepted by the automated systems."

"Guided?"

"They made other channels seem like they were in use."

"With what? The transmitters are smart enough to not get tricked by dead air and random

noise jamming techniques."

"They played an encoded loop of audio data and switched the encoding after each playback."

"What was that audio data?"

"A song."

" ... "

" ... "

"THAT song?!"

"Yes, sir."

"Fucking humans... Okay, so they guided our transmitters to a bad radio channel, then did some radio trickery to make it seem like the drones were reporting- Why didn't the troops over at the listening station notice something odd about the channel changes?"

"There was fairly large thunderstorm in the area. They reported irregularities in status reports, but attributed it interference."

"By the elders, if they are nothing else, they are thorough."

"They did some recording and rebroadcasting to intercept transmissions and edit the content to-"

"That's fine I get it. How did they deal with the drones? We had a fair number patrolling the area and they were armed with weaponry we know can kill humans."

"That's a bit complicated."

"Again... Step. By. Step. So, how were they able to approach the drones without getting blasted to bits?"

"They just walked up in a group."

" ... "

"They didn't show any signs of aggression."

" ... "

"And they were deemed to not be armed."

"Okay. Then, why does the report have this wonderful picture of our drones laid out in the dirt spelling, 'Fuck You' in human English. ... Huh. All the drone hands are posed giving that human middle finger gesture."

"The humans disabled the drones."

"A new chapter of human ingenuity I suppose?"

"You could say that."

"Okay. First question, how were they able to walk up to the drones?"

"It seems the humans figured out some parameters to our drones' threat escalation logic. They determined that as long as the drones weren't outnumbered more than 2 to 1, the drones would maintain non-lethal, non-combative suppression mode."

"Next. Second question... No signs of aggression?"

"Yes, reviewing recording logs, the humans approached calmly and started to debate with the drones."

"Debate?!"

"By default, most our suppression drones that have to be in the human populace will answer questions and use some degree of reasoning to try to defuse and deescalate confrontations to maintain the peace without resorting to violence. Judging by the humans we have identified, they twisted this to distract the drones."

"What humans were identified?"

"The list is on the report, sir. The only common thread is that they were either once politicians, lawyers, or... "

" ... "

"Philosophy majors."

"I guess every zerkog has its day. So, the drones are distracted. What disabled the drones and how were the humans not considered armed?"

"Nothing that the humans had in their possession was considered a threat by the drone's threat assessment system. We have made exceptions to certain items that would not normally register as harmful in the past, but these weren't on the list."

"Let me guess, we will be updating the system in the very near future with more mundane items."

"Yes. Because the humans used one of these to disable the drone."

" ... "

"You see when the drones were distracted, a sub-group of humans in the main group used either captured transmissions or maybe a rebroadcast of the command signal to open the micro-fusion reactor refueling port located on the upper back of the drone. Then, they quickly placed one of these right into the port."

" ... "

"Strangely the outer shell of our portable refueling cells is of a similar enough material that it doesn't initially trip any alarms until final verification. Unfortunately, at this stage the inner portal has opened up and the containment envelope temperatures are much higher than what the material can take and it melts... Everywhere inside the refueling port... And the refueling portals, both inner and outer, are unable to close... eventually letting all the fuel gases escape... and... Sir? Is everything okay?"

" ... "

"Oh, ah... You see this object I've been talking about is umm... A umm... Human device for-"

"I know. What. It. Is."

" ... Oh."

"As useful as visual aid it has been to your VERY animated demonstrations of what happened

to disable the drones, I'm going to ask this next question. Very. Nicely."

"Yes, sir?"

"Would you kindly remove THE. HUMAN DILDO. OFF. MY. ELDER FUCKING FORSAKEN DESK. NOW!!!!!"

"YES SIR!!!"

" ... "

"I'm incredibly sorry sir! I wasn't thinking of the implications-"

"It's. Okay. I just hope they didn't use for their intended purposes first before using them on us. So... That explains how they took out the drones. The last question, the most important question given recent history. What did the humans DO with the construction equipment they took?"

"It's in the next section of the report."

" ... "

" ... "

"Is that one of our heavy troop transports... in a pit trap... covered up past the wheels... in concrete?"

"Yes."

"... Is that one of your sibling's spawn using the sonic hammer on the concrete in the picture?"

"Yes! He's really enjoying the work and actually got a promotion last week. Our family group is very happy for him."

"See, that's good news! You have any more?"

" ... "

"No? Okay, let's continue your report then."