

Ghost in the Machine

by

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EXT. SPACE - MARS

The northern hemisphere is composed of mostly flat plains, while the southern hemisphere is marked by ridges and craters. Deep channels, plains and canyons suggest that water eroded the surface in the past.

These are the centres of intense drone activities, engaged in construction, mining and all techniques of fabrication.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

A wall screen is filled by the smartly attired Communications Director MELISSA 30s, seated at her console. Dressed in Company boiler suits, ANDREA and TOM both late 20s, are the basecamp's only human workers.

MELISSA
Core sample data looking good.
Thanks for all you do.

ANDREA
I thought you'd be impressed.

Melissa cuts her feed. Screen shows the corporate logo.

TOM
Why bother! She said that eleven minutes ago. Melissa doesn't expect a reply.

ANDREA
Never heard of manners, Tom?

TOM
I'm taking Pal out for a walk. He needs to stretch his legs.

Andrea turns, gives Tom a death look.

ANDREA
The robot dog doesn't need a walk. What's got into you?

TOM
Okay - I've trained him to fetch my golf balls.
C'mon Pal -

Looking exactly like a red setter dog, PAL jumps from his dog bed and with wagging tail follows Tom off screen.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

As Andrea works at her complex console, the wall screen shows various external views -

- drones building a massive Geodesic Dome structure.
- the sonic drill bit readouts from 8 miles into crust.
- % of iron, magnesium, aluminum, calcium, and potassium.
- polar drones, collecting and processing the CO2 "snow."
- external temperature showing is minus 70 C.
- Tom in space suit, atop a small hexagonal Astroturf green hitting golf balls into the far distance. Pal wearing goggles dashing off to retrieve them.

EXT. MARS SURFACE - CONTINUOUS

One golf ball lightly dusted in red, shivers as a dust devil starts up and swirls past. Vibrating now, the terrain seems to undulate then swallows the ball. Calm returns.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Andrea's control panel glitches.

ANDREA

Tom on your way back kick the reactor. Do something useful -

EXT. MARS SURFACE - CONTINUOUS

Pal bounds back, shaking a dust cloud from his coat. He drops a number of golf balls beside Tom's space boots.

TOM

- Will do Boss.
Thanks for all you do.
(To the dog)
It's an RTB buddy. We gotta check the reactor. You been pissing on it?

EXT/INT. REACTOR - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Both Tom and Pal regard the control panel.

TOM

Seems normal. What do you say?

PAL

(a.i. Male voice)
There's been a number of power interrupt glitches.
(MORE)

PAL(cont'd)

It's fully functional now but
this needs investigation.

TOM

(to Andrea)

You get that?

ANDREA

Copy fault log to Melissa -

PAL

- Already done.

ANDREA

Great. Now get back so we can
eat. Big day tomorrow - space
tanker brings goodies. We need an
early night.

TOM

On our way. Meatloaf ?

Pal woofs and wags his tail, weaves around Tom's legs.

TOM

Two hungry, happy campers
returning to base.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CANTEEN - NIGHT

Tom returns all three's TV dinner style plastic trays into
the trash compactor.

ANDREA

Maybe our biggest challenge is to
cast the gun barrel in the lava
tube of Olympus Mons, the largest
volcano on Mars.

TOM

Nearly a mile long, clad with
carbon nanotubes to withstand a
muzzle velocity of 50,000 metres
per second. What we shooting at?

ANDREA

That's classified.

TOM

That's some boy's toy!!

PAL

I will feel much safer after the
test shot.

TOM
Woo - hoo!! Let's blow some stuff
to smithereens!

Andrea and Pal give Tom a stern look.

SPACE - DAY

A gigantic space tanker orbits Mars. Its belly opens and all manor of heavy machinery tumbles down. Retro rockets slow their descent then -

EXT. MARS SURFACE - DAY

At the last minute elastic bubbles filled with air inflate around the objects to cushion their landing. Supplies and materials follow. Then a formation of bigger drones descend

EXT. MARS SURFACE - LATER

As the dust finally settles, Tom stands beside the front wheel of an oversized dumper truck. The wheel is five times his size. Pal cocks his leg against it, squirts some 3-in-1

Away from this activity, a crevice starts to vibrate. It coughs up dust then a golf ball - ejected with speed.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER -

EXT. MARS SURFACE - OLYMPUS MONS - DAY

Molten metal floods down into the lava tube. Steam, smoke and sparks fly in an hellish recreation upon Mars.

INT. LAVA TUBE - CONTINUOUS

The liquid metal swirls in weird formations, briefly revealing the face and body of the fearsome Goddess SABINE, dressed for war.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Andrea's control panel glitches. For a flash, Sabine's face glowers back at them.

ANDREA
Is it another overload?

TOM
You see that!!

PAL
We are using maximum power.

TOM
The face on the screen. A woman -

ANDREA
Not now Tom. We got one shot at
this process -

TOM
You didn't see her!!

PAL
Detecting abnormal Gravitational
waves and crust instability.

TOM
She wants us to stop. We've taken
enough from her planet.

EXT. MARS SURFACE - OLYMPUS MONS - CONTINUOUS

The last drops of molten metal poured, the gun barrel
starts to cool. The drones and machines amassed upon the
surface all power down - a very orange peace restored.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Andrea and Pal both regard Tom not quite believing what
they've just heard. Tom blinks hard, senses their concern

TOM
What?

ANDREA
"She wants us to stop." Who does?

Pal sniffs Tom, muzzles his hand, licks, looks up concerned

PAL
Let's get you to medical. Your
vitals are going haywire.

TOM
I'll be OK. Big gun envy?

He faints.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - MEDICAL BAY - LATER

Lasers sweep back and forth over Tom's body. Pal regards
some readouts and is processing the biometric data.

PAL
Your body's reacting to extreme
fight or flight.

TOM
I'm just anxious to shoot that
damn gun. It might explode -

PAL
What did you mean by this -

He replays Tom's earlier comment -

TOM
She wants us to stop. We've taken
enough from her planet.

Tom looks shocked.

TOM
I really said that? Robot dog
Doctor patient confidentiality-

INT. VIEWING ROOM BESIDE MEDICAL BAY - CONTINUOUS

Andrea watches, her face etched with concern. Pal's voice
comes from a speaker -

PAL
- Of course.

The window starts to darken to black; the audio is muted.

ANDREA
Damn you Tom! You had ONE thing
to do - fire that bloody gun!

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Andrea sends an encoded voice message to Melissa on Earth.

ANDREA
- So if Tom is losing his mind
I'll need a crib sheet on the gun
prep and operation. Then can I
shoot him? I'm aware this mission
must be completed on time.
Awaiting your response - out.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER -

EXT. MARS SURFACE - OLYMPUS MONS - DAY

Atop the summit caldera the black gun barrel is aimed high.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

The control screen shows an external view of the gun. Tom stands beside the screen looking up in awe. He gestures

TOM

That volcano towers 14 miles
above the Martian surface. The
gun barrel is a mile long.
Finally I'm ready to blow some
shit up!

ANDREA

I have our sealed orders - It's
our two moons, Deimos and Phobos.
They're crossing in a "mutual
event."
One shot - two moons.

TOM

(gleefully)
I have become the destroyer of
worlds!

He tracks the gun slightly clockwise, adjusts his aim.

EXT. MARS SURFACE - CONT

The now disused machinery starts to vibrate and quiver as the surface undulates - more than a Marsquake, waves emanate outwards changing the surface rocks into a sandy soup. The machinery sinks - swallowed into the orange maelstrom. The drones appear to be drowning.

The form of Sabine, the battle clad Martian Goddess rises up - a shape - a presence - a power over all she surveys.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CONTROL ROOM - CONT

The control screen briefly shows Sabine then becomes a mass of static. Alarms sound as tremors hit the basecamp. Andrea's control panel glitches - more alarms flash.

ANDREA

Diverting backup power to the
gun. Can you still fire?

TOM

Locked on targets. Firing
sequence started -

Pal woofs in alarm as Sabine materializes before them. Her face like thunder, she wags a finger of scorn at them. Andrea and Tom are both rendered inert.

As Pal watches both the color and life force is drained from them.

Sabine waves her arm. The alarms become silent - the gun control panel shows - Aborted.

This changes to - New target selected.

PAL
Sending Emergency SMS.
You're fucked Melissa!

EXT. MARS SURFACE - CONT

Still boiling in turmoil, all of what man had set onto the surface of Mars is swiftly sinking. The rocks, crevices, mountains swallow structures and machinery to now stand in silent sentry. It all disappears without trace.

Only the gun is left.

The guns turns, realigns.

INT. MARS BASECAMP - CONTROL ROOM - CONT

Is now deep beneath the surface of Mars.

Pal watches as the gun control panel draws a bead on the Earth.

The gun control panel shows - Target Acquired.

Then - Locked on target. Firing sequence started -

Sabine smiles slightly. She beckons to Pal.

Slowly both turn into orange dust as the basecamp implodes around them.

EXT. MARS SURFACE - CONT

Only the gun remains. The terrain looks peaceful, inert and untouched - a virgin desert planet.

Noiselessly, the gun fires. A gigantic pulse of energy and projectile careening towards Earth.

Dust devils swirl around the ancient volcano as the great structure shakes, swallowing the gun.

Sabine twirls and descends inside her planet as a stillness returns.

FADE OUT.