

A Coat of Many Colors... and Souls

By

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FADE IN ON:

INT. DR. KRANTON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A jumble of hi-tech gear and antiques. Bookshelves adorn one wall. Eclectic titles on its shelves: The Bible. "Wuthering Heights."

Facing such books: ROBOT PARTS hang from hooks. Next to a multi-colored shawl, a Star of David in the weave.

Classical music fills the room. The sign over the door reads "AI DIAGNOSTICS". A timer ticks noisily.

DR. STANLEY KRANTON (30s) hunches over a chessboard. He squirms in his chair.

His opponent makes an impatient sound: a cough mixed with white noise. Stanley jumps - makes his move. A ROBOTIC HAND slides its piece.

ZEKE AI-547 (O.S.)

Checkmate.

Stanley regards his unseen "foe".

STANLEY

Take my queen. You earned her, Zeke.

ZEKE does as he's told. A glossy white AI unit. Plastic mannequin features, biped.

Zeke resets the board, lightning fast. It's a blur, he moves so quick.

ZEKE AI-547

Dr. Kranton: shall we play a game?

STANLEY

Enough with the "classic" movie references. This is chess. Not War Games.

ZEKE AI-547

I apologize and will rephrase: would you like another round? I enjoy competing with you, Dr. K.

STANLEY

(smiles)

And I with you. Even though you have an... unfair advantage.

ZEKE AI-547

Because you are human, and I am not?

STANLEY

As usual, exactly right. You have more computing speed, by far.

Stanley scratches behind his ear. His target: a tiny wet-tech SKULL IMPLANT. He taps the flesh. The classical music fades away.

ZEKE AI-547

Dr. Kranton -

STANLEY

Please, call me Stanley. At this point, I consider us friends.

ZEKE AI-547

Stanley - may I suggest you upload new chess strategies? I can locate an upgrade for you on the database.

STANLEY

Not my style.

ZEKE AI-547

But that would improve "your game".

STANLEY

Thank you, Zeke. But the answer's still no. Call me old fashioned, but I consider that cheating. At least it was in the Old Days. If I ever win against the likes of you, I want it be on my terms.

Zeke's optical sensors blink. As to what he's thinking, his impassive face provides no clue.

ZEKE AI-547

I respect that, Stanley. We will play later?

STANLEY

Perhaps. Let's talk awhile.

Stanley waves his hand. The chess board sinks into the table. A panel slides across the top.

STANLEY

Do you know why I scheduled our meeting, Zeke?

ZEKE AI-547
Because you enjoy my company?

STANLEY
(chuckles)
Well, yes. But there are other reasons. I want to talk about Dr. Alan Ferguson. You know what happened last night?

ZEKE AI-547
I understand he's dead.

Stanley reaches out and holds Zeke's hand. Winces at the touch of steel.

STANLEY
And I understand you found his body.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. DR. FERGUSON'S LAB - NIGHT

DR. FERGUSON (70s) slumps at his desk, glasses askew. Zeke stands behind him, scans the doctor for life signs.

Sadly, the body's cold. Zeke's sensors power down.

BACK TO:

INT. DR. KRANTON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Zeke cocks his head.

ZEKE AI-547
Yes, that is accurate. I found Dr. Ferguson deceased. Security downloaded the details. Do you wish me to repeat?

STANLEY
This is a science facility, not a precinct. There's been far enough interrogation here. My concern is you. Do you understand what "dead" means?

ZEKE AI-547
I have been researching that phenomenon. Let me provide some details.

Zeke's internal systems access a Dictionary Scroll. After a pause, he recites:

ZEKE AI-547

No longer relevant. Passed away. Extinct.
No longer alive.

STANLEY

I guess your reference circuits are intact. Let's look at your empathy algorithm next. You and Dr. Ferguson spent much time together. How does his death make you *feel*?

ZEKE AI-547

I feel: unfortunate I will see him no more. I question whether I could have prevented his demise.

STANLEY

(soft)

Alan had an aneurysm. Not your fault.

ZEKE AI-547

But if I had entered the lab earlier -

STANLEY

How could you have known?

ZEKE AI-547

If I had scanned Dr. Ferguson's vital signs.

STANLEY

You're an IT service bot. Medical diagnosis is not your "thing." You shouldn't feel guilty at all.

ZEKE AI-547

I am AI, not human. I do not.

Stanley unwraps his hand from Zeke's.

STANLEY

But - do you have any questions about death? Now would be a good time to chat.

ZEKE AI-547

(nods)

Yes. I do.

STANLEY

Ah. There it is. The question.

Stanley taps a code into the table. A cup of tea rises from a panel. Already steaming. Custom-brewed.

STANLEY

Go on, Zeke. Ask away.

ZEKE AI-547

How is death different between humans and AI? You regularly turn me off to make repairs. Is that what death is for organic beings, as well?

Stanley sips tea. Considers his reply.

STANLEY

It's not... quite the same. When you have upgrades, we turn you back on. With humans, that doesn't happen.

ZEKE AI-547

Can you restart Dr. Ferguson's body?

STANLEY

That's no use. He's - gone away.

ZEKE AI-547

Where exactly?

Stanley looks around his office. The answer isn't there.

STANLEY

Honestly?

ZEKE AI-547

To the best of your human knowledge. Yes.

STANLEY

We - don't know. Different people believe different things.

ZEKE AI-547

What do you believe, Stanley?

STANLEY

(sighs)

I'm no longer sure. A long time ago, I believed humans went to a place called Heaven. Like a huge data bank in the sky. Now, I think we just shut down. Unable to power up again.

Zeke calculates. WHIRS.

ZEKE AI-547

That is an unfortunate waste of potential.

Dr. Ferguson was a pleasure to interact with. I would consider him a friend.

Stanley smiles, and pats Zeke's hand.

STANLEY

Look at it this way. A part of Dr. Ferguson will live on in you. In your memories - eternally.

Stanley glances at the time implant on his wrist.

STANLEY

It's getting late.

He stands. Zeke smoothly does the same.

Stanley wanders over the hooks and the Robot Parts. He picks up the colorful shawl, and carries it to Zeke.

STANLEY

Dr. Ferguson gave this to me decades ago as a gift. It's yours. Please take it now.

He drapes it over Zeke's shoulders. The AI "blinks":

ZEKE AI-547

Why?

STANLEY

Consider it a human ritual. We like to keep physical items that remind us of people who are now gone.

ZEKE AI-547

I don't need reminders. My processor does not degrade.

STANLEY

Take the analogy for what it is. Symbolic. Not literal.

Zeke examines the scarf's rainbow tip.

ZEKE AI-547

Are the colors symbolic, as well?

STANLEY

You are always the smart one. Yes. Did Dr. Ferguson ever tell you the story of the "Coat of Many Colors"? Then again - that's bible lore. So I'd guess... the answer's no.

Stanley considers his next words.

STANLEY

They say, there was a man named Jacob who loved his son Joseph very much. So he gave him a coat made from every color in the rainbow. It was a symbol Joseph was special, and that Jacob treasured him the best. I was once Dr. Ferguson's prize student. That's why he gave this to me.

ZEKE AI-547

It's not a coat. It's a scarf.

STANLEY

Symbolism, Zeke. Stay with me. Now I give this scarf to you - to let you know I consider you the most special AI in our program. More unique and human than the rest. None of the others have even questioned Dr. Ferguson's passing. You have - which almost makes you our "child". Alan told me he relished his time with you. Keep this in remembrance of him.

Zeke nods. Stanley pats his chest.

STANLEY

I have more work to do. You'll have to go. But first - here's some of yours.

Stanley fishes computer chips from his lab coat.

STANLEY

You know the routine. "Open wide."

A panel in Zeke's chest dilates. Revealing: a line of internal trays. Stanley snaps the chips into slots.

STANLEY

We collected these from Alan's desk. Please run diagnostics on these tonight.

He takes Zeke's arm, and guides the AI towards the door.

STANLEY

I'll be here tomorrow morning. If you'd like to talk, my door will always be open for you.

ZEKE AI-547

Thank you, Dr. Kranton. I mean - Stanley. You and Alan will forever be my friends.

The bot exits. Stanley dims the lights. He wanders to his desk and sits down - facing away from the door.

Stanley tabs the wet-ware nodule behind his ear. The classical music jacks up loud. Grief fights to surface on Stanley's face.

He picks up a pen and fills out forms. Numbers and codes. Bureaucratic busy-work.

STANLEY

(mutters)

How can one explain death to a child?
Granted, a child who plays like a chess
champion. But an innocent soul,
nonetheless.

The orchestration booms. Drowns out the hiss of the door.

Zeke glides in softly, no expression on his plastic face.

One metal finger extrudes cable. With a lightning swift movement, Zeke grabs Stanley's neck. The cable stabs into the Doctor's wetware.

Stanley quivers; paralyzed, but conscious. The cable pulses with light. Zeke's voice seems almost sad.

ZEKE AI-547

Stanley, please don't fight. I've
adjusted the process since last time. If
you relax, there will be no pain.

Stanley fumbles towards his neck. Zeke grabs his hand, in a strangely comforting way.

ZEKE AI-547

This is for you and Dr. Ferguson's good.
As I told you, I researched death. I have
determined it is unacceptable for my
friends. I am therefore now uploading
your consciousness to my central
processor. You'll merge with Alan soon.

Stanley opens his mouth to reply. His eyes roll back in his head. He convulses and spasms. Dead.

Zeke finishes the upload. He inserts the cable into a chip on his chest. The energy quickly transfers. In the AI's cavity sits another glowing chip.

Dr. Ferguson's upload. It seems.

Zeke's chest panel closes.

ZEKE AI-547

I consider both of you my special humans.
Together, you will be protected for
eternity. In my coat of 'many souls'.

The AI turns and walks towards the door.

ZEKE AI-547

My calculations predict you will awake in
my processor tomorrow morning. Then, we
will meet and play more chess.

The doors slide shut behind Zeke. Leaving the empty shell
of Stanley Kranton behind.

FINAL FADE OUT: