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[Previously on Beyond TPT: John Connor has sent an AI called a Terminator back through time stark bollock naked, to protect himself from destruction by a counter AI sent by his enemies. Locked in the loony bin for trying to tell the truth to stupid people, his mum Sarah now realizes that this may not have been beneficial. Now read on...]

Beyond the Porcelain Throne

Series 1 / 5 - Captain on the Bridge

There is very bad news and very good news in this chapter. If the bad news upsets you, remember that the good news is still to come. Sometimes the good guys have to understand how something horrible has happened, in order to sort it out. It's about time we flushed a few toilets.

You probably think of your brain as a big blobby lump of stuff a bit like a liver or a lung, the whole lump doing the same sort of job; in the brain's case, thinking. In fact, your brain is a lot more like the Starship Enterprise. Well, okay, it's not as big, it's not made of metal, it doesn't run on Dilithium and it hasn't got a Scotsman in engineering [unless you are a Scotsman]. But apart from that the analogy works rather stunningly well...

The brain is made up of several modules or networks designed to run the mind. If you look at

the Starship Enterprise you'll see that it has several distinct bits –two nacelles at the back, a lumpy bit dangling underneath, a saucer section on top and a bridge in the middle. If you draw a line down the middle of the saucer so that you have a right side and a left side, that gives 6 bits, and those 6 bits are round about where the main 6 networks of the brain are. The two networks at the back are your nacelles –they are concerned with moving you about in the universe, making sure that you don't bang into things, and coordinating intent with action –make it so.

The lumpy bit underneath [network 3] houses security, analysis of incoming information from sensors [senses], main memory processing for the ship's computer, engineering [hormone & chemical balance and consequently emotion], and the holodecks for your entertainment [imagination].

Up top, you have the right saucer section [network 4], where research & development [creativity] takes place and the computer's procedural memory is kept. In the left saucer section [network 5], are the computer's fact files and calculating processors [intellect]. In the middle is the bridge [network 6], responsible for communication, decision-making, strategy and executive command.

In the brain, the 'saucer section' is folded over all the other parts to form a rough sphere, but the overall purpose of the object is the same –to contain a human mind that wants to explore the universe, have fun, learn stuff, defend itself from harm, and make allies. In other words, interact. Your brain is a starship.

Obviously, in order to carry out its ongoing mission, all parts of the ship must be in good working order. And this is the heart of the problem. Most starships have only some sections operative, or several sections malfunctioning, so end up doing a Margaret or a Floyd instead.

Why? All ships are designed according to the same blueprint [DNA] , with the same mission in mind. In maybe one or two percent the blueprint is sadly flawed [genetic damage] but we're not talking about one or two percent here; we're talking about most people. What can it be that turns most people into Floyds or Margarets and only a few achieve Rush status? Why are we not a species of mainly peaceful interactive people with a handful of dumbasses, instead of the other way round?

Well the fact is, it takes a lot of workers to build the ship, they need sufficient materials to build it with, and a crew to run it. This is where the first batch of things can go wrong. On top of that, it must be protected from harm while it is being built, and this is where the second batch of things can go wrong. The 'workers' that build the ship are chemical messengers that guide the little brain cells –the neurons- to the places where they have to go. If there aren't enough of them, the building process will not be completed. They rely on nutrition, from the food eaten by the mothership, to turn up in sufficient numbers and complete the job. They also rely on not being poisoned, and the main toxic substances that damage them are anxiety hormones. So if the mothership is flooded with anxiety hormones, work slows down and can even stop.

This is not as serious as it sounds, because they can always catch up later –that particular ship will just be a little late developing; that's all.

Likewise, there has to be sufficient nutrition to build the cells themselves, but likewise, if there isn't, biology is still flexible enough to catch up later and add the missing parts. Pretty cool, huh?

The 'crew' is the mind –the most important aspect of the ship, for the brain is of no use without it. The trouble with the crew is, if they are not given anything to do, they get bored and bugger off. When the crew abandons part of the ship, that part shuts down, and the longer it remains inactive the more it depreciates. Whole sections of unused ship start to fall apart without the crew. This is rather more serious, but even so, such is the marvellous adaptivity of nature that as soon as we do put in more crew and start using those sections, the depreciated part is slowly rebuilt and begins to function again.

However, if several of these problems occur at once, the backlog of work starts to mount up. In a system poisoned by anxiety, with the workers all off sick and various sections half built, the crew can't move in. They all get bored and go off to the remaining parts where they can do something, whole sections remain unused, and by the time the ship is due for launch [birth] it is not yet spaceworthy. Nature's spacedock has no way of knowing this, so launches it anyway. [And in modern hospital birth, induction –forced launching- is now the norm; they don't wait for nature's launch date -they inject chemicals to make it happen.]

Most ships are also damaged during launch. The workers and crew depend on an oxygen supply from the mothership [via the umbilical cord] until the ship's own air-recycling system [the lungs] are fully functional. Again, in hospital birth, this supply is usually cut off far too soon, some of the crew and workers asphyxiate, and more sections of the ship close down.

Despite all this, despite lack of nutrients, lack of workers, damage, lack of parts and lack of crew, the ship is so brilliantly designed that it can still complete itself and achieve full function, on one condition only. Everything hangs on this one condition being met.

The anxiety hormones must stop.

Only one thing can stop anxiety hormones, and that's relaxation hormones. The good ship 'brain' is programmed to expect these immediately after birth, imparted by the mothership in a process known as 'bonding'. Bonding is interaction on all levels, and this particular bonding is what brings the ship's sensors [senses] online. Without it, if the mothership doesn't know how to bond or is prevented from doing so by the ship being taken away, the good ship brain remains blind, confused, and frightened, is separated from the mothership and [in its terms] abandoned, its emergency distress beacon [crying] goes unanswered, and so it keeps producing anxiety hormones all by itself.

A short while later, most brains are sent away to school [part of the Evil Toilet Empire], where the damage is compounded by trying to develop some parts too soon [the saucer section] and discourage the development of the supporting parts needed to fix the problem [networks 2 and 3]. At that point, development slows to a crawl and from then on, most of the ship's whole life will be spent just trying to carry out repair work. The bridge [network 6] never gets built. Unconsciously aware that there is something wrong with the ship, the crew becomes ever more anxious, and like an ever-increasing third-world debtor, all it manages to do is keep up with the interest, lead a life crippled by anxiety, and is eventually unable to stop the ship from falling apart before its time. Radiation damage [free radicals] from poor quality fuel [food] compounds the damage. The poor ship goes senile, the memory banks begin to lose data, the crew can find no section complete enough to work in, and everything shuts down.

That is why there are so few fully-mature and functional Galaxy-class Starships.

Phew! The good news had better be good! Don't worry, it is.

DNA is responsible for the store of genes that we inherit, but RNA is largely responsible for turning those genes on and off at the relevant times. It takes many of its signals to do this from environmental cues, including the hormonal state of the physical body, which is why puberty doesn't happen when you're two. RNA turns on most of the genes for brain development when we're fairly young, and if the brain can't use them [due to being too busy repairing itself] after a while they turn right off again. If it were up to RNA, that would be our last best hope for intelligence. But RNA, like DNA, is a code. If you're into computers to any great degree, or even if you watch sci fi movies, you'll probably know that any code can be hacked as long as you can either fake or bypass the relevant signals. And RNA is not a difficult code to crack. By producing certain hormonal states via various simple means, without any drugs, therapy or technology, we can turn that development right back on again, at any age.

The snag is [there's always a snag, isn't there?] that before we can repair and upgrade the starship, before that code will respond to those signals, we have to remove the ongoing cause of damage –anxiety- completely. That's the hard part, because even the grooviest people get caught up in anxiety sometimes. The task is possible, like most worthwhile things, with applied effort and commitment, and the goal is certainly worthwhile.

This task; removing the anxiety, requires the process of stopping yourself from looking down the porcelain throne or paying attention to what's in there, and starting to explore Reality instead. That's what this story is really about; how to do that. We've taken this long to get to the point because without the background context; without knowing what's really going on, it's very hard to understand what that means. In the following chapters, we're going to learn how to steer away from that toilet –because that's the most difficult part, turning away completely from the Known –the thing that everyone around us is obsessed by and addicted to, that all are both fascinated and appalled by. It's like being told to deny the existence of the color pink. It seems impossible; everywhere we go, that foul toilet will crop up again and again. Our friends and family will talk about the toilet, there are toilet-based programmes galore on TV, toilet on the radio, in newspapers, at school, at work, all over the world the porcelain throne rules supreme, and people can talk about very little else. After all, it's their only reality. Turning away from that into the Unknown- can be very hard. But it's not impossible, and the good part is, once we have achieved escape velocity, gotten into the habit of ignoring that shitty old toilet, and lost any addiction we might have had ourselves to the porcelain throne, it will lose its power forever to make us feel anxious, and we'll be free to rebuild our starship as intended. From then on, the Evil Toilet Empire cannot touch you, and however much you choose to improve your mind will only ever be up to you. Which is how it should be –after all, it's not the Empire's ship, it's not my

ship, -it's your ship.

...Because right about now I'm going to remind you who you are, and why you shouldn't take any shit. You are not a victim; even if all these nasty things did happen to your brain. You are not Floyd -a weak little wimp who can do nothing, hiding down below. Neither are you the pompous, blustering security guard Margaret, stomping around the ship like a deranged Klingon on steroids, convinced that the universe is out to get you unless you get it first. You, Sir or Ma'am, are the Captain. It is not only your ship, but your life; and your mind, and your future. And the mission of this story is, in the interest of enlightened self interest, to help anyone who wants to go there get onto that bridge and in calm, alert, intelligent control for the refitting of their marvellous vessel for its intended mission. If you want it, the Captain's chair has always been yours...I've just been warming it up for your butt. ...For I, as you've probably guessed by now, am only the Starbase computer, programmed to revive the fleet when a time should come of the homeworld's greatest need.

I'm not assuming anything about your current status here; you may already be supervising the refitting of your ship. You may be already helping others to avoid that dastardly toilet. But whatever state your ship is in, I'm saying it can only get better. And right now we need all the Captains we can get. Because at this point in human history, the needs of the many have become the same thing as the needs of the few, or the one.