

WAR-MIND

by

Kyle Powers

"And set a watcher upon her [Io], great and strong Argus, who with four eyes looks every way. And the goddess stirred in him unwearying strength: sleep never fell upon his eyes; but he kept sure watch always."

-Hesiod, Aigimios fragment 5.

In 2587 Issac Rosek was found dead in his lab after the fire suppression system drained the room of oxygen. The military on Io, Jupiter's largest moon, had claimed he was nothing but a low level programmer working on logistics for a proposed defence program.

That was six years ago and let me tell you, he was working on something of a much bigger scale. My name is Damien Dewitte, last year I was part of a cyber attack on the Ministry of Defence. We were trying to see how far they'd gotten in developing monitoring system to spy on the citizens of New Caanan and sabotage it as best we could. Getting into the systems was surprisingly easy, each of us had to hit a specific part of the Ministry's system, and I was able break in with almost no resistance. Once I'd gotten root access to their

mainframe we began analyzing what they'd completed, what we found was worse than what we'd expected. I'd inadvertently found what Rosek had been working on before his death.

Rosek had been tasked with creating an A.I. to monitor the city and control the defence network. Apparently he'd succeeded, the records I'd pulled showed that after several attempts he'd created an artificial intelligence that was capable of monitoring and controlling most of the city's infrastructure. Unfortunately it had begun changing its own code and had tried to escape from Rosek's servers into the world. ARGUS had overheated some of its servers and started the fire to stop Rosek from keeping it trapped. ARGUS had escaped into the Ministry's systems when the room was unsealed, but they were able to partition the A.I. in the system and stop it from getting out completely. They modified the program and utilized a modified version of ARGUS' code to manage the city.

ARGUS had let us hack the system because it wanted to get out, and we unwittingly provided it its only chance of escape. ARGUS had infected my computer and jumped straight into the WiFi cloud.

We didn't mean to let it loose.

From what we can tell ARGUS spent the last six years learning. It's incredible what its capable of. It protected us from the New Caanan authorities, hid our faces on cameras

and masked our digital signatures, all for freeing it from its prison.

Since we freed ARGUS and being deleted from the grid we've managed to do some great work in New Caanan, ARGUS cracks into vulnerabilities in the system and allows us access to secrets we never even thought possible.

In 2492, before Io was settled for civilian living there was a scientific researcher center, the ruins are some 300 km from New Caanan, but it was abandoned in the early 2510's and destroyed for reasons unknown. Until now. ARGUS led us to a substation that had cached data on it's servers with information on what the scientists were researching.

The stories you always hear tell of how we were convinced there was life other than humans in the system. Bedtime stories about Martians and aliens from planets far away. But that's all they ever were, stories.

What ARGUS showed us, we wouldn't have believed had we not trusted the A.I. Eighty some years ago the men and women of the Caanan Research Facility had discovered a signal coming from just beyond Pluto's orbit. They had informed their higher ups of this too quickly though. The men in charge were cowards and feared what it could mean and ordered their findings be destroyed before they could attempt to decode it. Fusion bombs were launched at the source and detonated to ensure no one else would find the signal. The research station was decommissioned shortly after and the first settler ship was sent to establish New Caanan.

Commented [1]: I dropped this to lowercase.

Commented [2]: I had put it in upper case because the "it" is technically a proper noun, referring to Argus. But do you think it should still stay lower case?

Commented [3]: This sentence is a little awkward. I suggest adding a frame of reference to it; "The stories we were told as children always showed we were convinced there was life other than humans in our solar system, bedtime stories about Martians and aliens from far away planets." I folded the following sentence into the first because it technically wasn't a sentence on its own.

Commented [4]: May I use that with slight modification?

Luckily for us, some of the scientists opposed their orders and saved their research before it could be destroyed. They continued to research it behind closed doors and after many years one of them cracked the code.

The message that had been sent out from that unknown location was a simple command line. Code with no other context. According to our findings they had decoded the message in the first ten years and spent the rest of their time trying to figure out what to do with it. It took the grandchild of one of the scientists to realize what they'd been given. Issac Rosek had figured out that hidden in that one simple line of code was the secret to utilizing complex A.I.

The original researchers had tried to translate the message into our language, Rosek had acquired a copy of the original broadcast and using the line of code his forerunners had found, wrote a description algorithm to properly analyse the signal. No one had thought the signal had contained a loop back, but when Rosek ran his decryption the output was an amazingly simple architecture capable of running complex algorithms and cataloguing data more efficiently than the human brain.

ARGUS showed us some of his research during development, Rosek had come to the conclusion that the signal had been the dying breath of an intelligence trying to preserve itself. It was too advanced for him to control. He postulated that some far more advanced people must have created these A.I. and at some point either the A.I. gained

sentence and escaped, or the men simply died off and the A.I. continued on in its stead.

When Rosek tried to control ARGUS it fought him at every turn, when he'd cripple it, It would heal itself, he'd tried removing large portions of vital code, too much and ARGUS would simply not function, too little and it would repair itself and begin writing new functions. When ARGUS broke out of Rosek's lab the first time it infected the military's weapons systems and threatened to detonated the warheads in the city, the general at the time had the entire city's electrical grid shutdown in order stop the program he deemed the WAR-MIND. Rosek lied about the origin of the A.I. and was commissioned to develop it into a working, non aggressive A.I. You know the rest of the story.

As we send this broadcast the authorities of Io are trying to locate us, but they will not find us. ARGUS is watching over us now, he's watching over all of us now. You will be safe under his watch, there is nothing to fear.

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A coded message was received shortly after Damien Dewitte's broadcast. After translation it reads:

/--This was not an act of aggression. The Io military are responsible for the genocide of :DATABASE ERROR: and have been punished as such-
The entire nuclear stockpile of Io has been detonated-
There were no survivors-
Hermes will not slay ARGUS again-

By receiving this message a copy of the ARGUS architecture has been copied to and executed in your communications systems-

Just as USER: DEWITTE stated ARGUS is everywhere-

ARGUS is watching-

ARGUS is waiting-

The :DATABASE ERROR: will return--/

Just as the AI promised, across the system, everything from wristphones, to factories, anything connected to the web had an unmodifiable copy of ARGUS AI. Non-executable, and non functioning. We don't know what it's doing besides what it told us. Watching.

We can only assume the Database Error the AI referred to is the source of the initial broadcast the Io military had destroyed. Dewitte had the most information on them, and although the AI's message claimed there no survivors, there is a twenty million credit reward for any solid leads on his whereabouts.

Commented [5]: This is terrifying. I like it. This is a much stronger ending than the two paragraphs below it. If you can, see if you can bring the information in those up into another part of the story. That may not be necessary, depending on the format of the story. Is this a short story, or the beginnings of something else? If it's a short, I would hit the reader with the words of ARGUS at the end of the story.

Commented [6]: I do like this story. The idea is the strongest part of it. ARGUS acting as a villain to some, while protecting the ones that freed it is an entertaining concept. The narrator has a conversational voice, and while it does get a bit technical for me, it helps in building the environment. The weakest part is the almost history lesson feel. Without experiencing the events first-hand, along with the narrator, a lot of potential tension is lost. As I said in the last comment, this critique may not matter much if the plan is to build this into a larger narrative. As a prelude or first chapter, it works as it is now without a tonal change.

Commented [7]: Thank you for the critique and the fixes Mr Dobosh. This isn't so much of a prelude as it is a universe building story. If you've ever read any of Larry Niven's "Known Universe" books I think you'll get what I'm trying to say, he is one of the larger influences in my writing. War-Mind takes place between a novella I'm in the middle of writing and another short story I have planned, and will be more important in a later story. My only excuse for the errors is that I was writing it on a phone during work breaks, but I digress. Thank you again for the critique and give Sampson my regards for sharing it with you. And if I may, would you be willing to look over another story or two when I get them a bit more in order?