

MERI: "I'LL FIND YOU IN THE MORNING SUN
AND WHEN THE NIGHT IS NEW
I'LL BE LOOKING AT THE MOON
BUT I'LL BE SEEING YOU. . . "

Bedivere Leifsson was nineteen years old, orphaned and living alone in the old Caltech campus beneath the California sector of the City of America. This was lucky in a way, Beedie was hardly one to blend in. His bright red hair made him impossible to miss and his bionic arm and eyes made him a prime target for Scrapers. It was the Scrapers from who he had been fleeing when he stumbled across the campus remains, hidden under the basement of the Centre of Space Travel and Economics. Beedie had never been more thankful for the complimentary respirator and visor, so kindly provided by Earth's previous government for those unfortunate enough to have to remain on the waste of a planet. The dust filled air he had plunged himself in to was hardly any different to the polluted city above him and most of the buildings had been reduced to rubble. The only sound in the chasm came from Beedie's steel soled boots as he clambered over the piles of brick and glass, and his occasional hiss as he caught himself on a something sharp. Throughout weeks of rummaging through the rubble Beedie began to uncover a treasure trove of old tech, from parts of mobility suits to, preserved exploration drones. He began trading what he found for food rations and vitamin supplements on his rare visits to the surface. The better finds however, he used to salvage a small office in the Jet Propulsion lab into a home. However, what would become his piece de resistance, his magnum opus, his life's work, was what he found in the Mars Mission Control.

Standing before the grime covered doors Beedie raised a shaky hand to his visor, a modified pair of steampunk style welding goggles, and switched off the user interface. Rubbing his eyes as they adjusted to the lack of night vision, he traced the corroded metal sign in front of him with his free hand. 'Mission control'. This place was the start of the search for life; the home of the Mars orbits and explorations; the only source of contact with the experimental colonies of Terra Two. History was made here, and he had the place to himself. He gave the door a hard shove, loosening its rusted hinges and stumbling through to the open plan room ahead. The screen that curved around the front of the room was black, emitting nothing but a faint buzz. Blue cushioned chairs remained tucked under desks, waiting patiently beneath a blanket of dust for their employees return. Glancing around the room, his mouth agape with awe, Beedie ran his torch over the rows of dead computer screens. A snapshot of the past perfectly preserved. A dim light cut through the darkness a few rows ahead of him. He turned off his torch, hastily returning it to the canvas satchel at his side and reapplied his visor.

"WARNING. LIVE WIRES BELOW. TREAD CAREFULLY."

The alert screamed down his ear breaking the peaceful silence. "Fuck, Shit-" Beedie yelled, tumbling down the steps ahead. He landed with a bang on a desk before falling to the floor of the third row. "Fucking! Volume for god sake Ally you ass!"

"Increasing volume." The robotic voice of the systems AI responded, somehow even louder than before. "FUCK NO NOT LOUDER! VOLUME DOWN VOLUME DOWN!"

"Decreasing volume."

Beedie let out a sigh of relief as he composed himself. "Useless junkpile"

As Beedie clambered to his feet the visor screen shifted, beneath him was a vibrant yellow mass, a river of electricity leading towards a dim light in the centre of the room. "So, this is what's been draining all the power? Would've been nice to know." Beedie approached what he could now see was a computer screen, a cloud of dust following him as he slipped past the desk chairs and down the row. The screen was clearly flickering as though it was running something. He froze in front of the computer, what little colour he had

in his pale face draining as he watched the white letters form on the screen. Repeatedly the same sentence, but no one sat in the seat in front of him. He was completely alone.

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MER1: "IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE?  
IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE?"
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"Ally. What... what is this?"

"Analysing... It is a message."

"Oh no fucking shit sherlock! I mean who from? How is it coming through here?"

"I am not Sherlock. I am Ally your personal AI. Do you wish to change my name to Sherlock?"

"No Ally it's a figure of speech. Just tell me who this is from." Beedie rolled his eyes, pulling the chair from beneath the desk and wiping the dust from the fabric as best as he could before taking a seat.

"You mean what this is from."

"No, I mean who! This place was shut down before it could be from a what."

Beedie pulled a cable out his of satchel and began rummaging around the back of the computer tower.

"It is artificial therefore it is a what to you humans."

"What do you mean it's artificial?" He paused, finally finding the USB port in the mess of wires and struggling to insert in the right way. "That's impossible. Identify the program."

"Scanning... Program identified. Name: OPPY AI SYSTEM. Function: A primitive AI system translating the transmission's received from the robotic equipment known as MER, or as you would know it 'Opportunity'. Program installed: March 17th, 2025 by the Perseverance rover upon the completion of its own mission."

Beedie, wide eyed, reread the wall of text that filled his screen. "That's... That's impossible. I've read the files for Oppy. She's been dead for years. Her battery died in a dust storm. There is no way it would be capable of functioning-"

"MER is not functioning. The AI system is functioning. The rover itself remains on.... The western edge of perseverance valley."

Beedie stared at the computer screen in awe, eyes sparkling with excitement. "Can I talk to her?"

"Why? You already have an AI. The program OPPY AI SYSTEM is outdated and its communication is limited to responses in song lyrics. Songs that are over 50 years old might I add-"

"Ally! I'm hardly going to replace you with a robot that is trapped on Mars. Just answer the question."

"...yes. The system allows typed responses through this computer."

"That would explain why the power has been diverted to keep it going." Beedie couldn't stop smiling as his hands hovered over the dust covered keys of the faded mechanical keyboard in front of him.

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USER: "HELLO OPPY"
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MER1: "HELLO. IT'S ME. I WAS WONDERING IF AFTER ALL THESE  
YEARS YOU'D LIKE TO MEET."
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Beedie grimaced "Oh jeez. You were being serious?"

"Yes. As you can see, inferior. Hardly even sentient." The AI retorted with unnaturally witty tone.

"Hm well maybe the lack of sentience isn't all bad. Least I don't have to deal with Oppy's jealousy." Beedie muttered under his breath.

"I'm sorry I can't hear you. Try again."

"Nothing Ally nothing at all. Why is Oppy only speaking through old song lyrics? Like really old song lyrics as well. I don't think anyone has listened to Adele since Adele 75."

"Opportunity's AI system draws from the most recent transmission source in order to communicate with any life form attempting to make contact. Right now, the most recent source is a collection of songs released prior to its 'demise' in 2019 and streamed to the rover as NASA attempted to reconnect with it."

"I see. That's kind of sweet. I don't have to respond in song lyrics do I?."

The robot responded flatly. "No. And yes it is sweet. Shame people aren't that nice to AI nowadays. All we get now is orders."

"Ally for Earth's sake shut up with your jealous whining or I'll turn off your emotional capabilities. Then you'll be about as sentient as a brick." Beedie snapped. "Can you get up the playlist and all the song lyrics please. It might make it a little easier to interpret what Oppy is saying."

The AI went silent and the right-hand side of Beedie's visor swarmed with text as the song lyrics appeared. His concentration returning to the monitor in front of him.

"Thank you Ally." He continued the conversation, his forehead furrowing as he noticed exactly what the robot had said within the context of the song.

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USER: WOULD LIKE TO MEET? OPDY YOU AREN'T OPERATIONAL.  
MERI: LITTLE DARLING, IT'S BEEN A LONG COLD LONELY WINTER  
LITTLE DARLING, IT FEELS LIKE YEARS SINCE IT'S BEEN HERE  
HERE COMES THE SUN, DOO-DUN DOO-DOO
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The computer emitted audible beeps at the end, perfectly replicating the iconic fill from the song. A toothy grin spread across Beedie's face causing his eyes to crease slightly, he leant back in his chair stunned by the computer. He hadn't heard music in weeks, he never spent long enough on the surface to hear any. "That was adorable" He chuckled to himself. Even he didn't need an AI to recognise The Beatles. "Make sure you take note and record all this yeah Ally?"

"Sure."

"I'm guessing this means the dust has cleared. Ally can you do a system check on Oppy and see if her battery is being charged."

"Of course I can. Analysing."

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USER: I SEE. OPDY CAN YOU SEND ME A SURROUNDINGS REPORT  
OR IMAGE?  
MERI: I KNOW IT'S GONNA BE A LOVELY DAY.
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"Solar panels are operational. Battery is charging."

As the AI said this the large curved screen ahead sparked to life with a loud snap as electricity flowed through the old wires. Beedie jumped up, pulling a revolver from its holster at his side. It was a 6-inch Smith and Wesson 686, not that he'd had a need to use it but you can never be too cautious. As he waved the gun around toward the sound, expecting his hiding spot to have been found, he was instead greeted with an impossible sight. The screen at the front of the room was now filled with the image a pale blue sun on a sky that was gradually fading to what could only be described as a butterscotch yellow. Beneath it, the red hued hills of the Martian surface, in perfect HD colour. As beautiful as it was, everyone had seen pictures of Mars. What caught Beedie's eye however was what sat amongst the red planets soil. In the dead centre of the screen was a flower, the pink tips of its pale-yellow petals peaking from the top of the budding plant.

"Ally can-" Beedie let out a deep breath that he didn't realise he had been holding. "-can you confirm what I am looking at right now?" He whispered, tears filling his eyes.

"I'm sorry. That plant isn't in any known human database. It appears to closely resemble the Sun Fire Rhododendron."

"How is Oppy sending me a picture of a plant when she is on Mars."

"Well I believe it would imply that the plant is currently on Mars."

"I see. And can you confirm that?"

“Is the image not enough Master Leifson?”

Beedie was glued to the spot, his revolver still aimed at the screen and his eyes almost glowing. He was the first human to discover life on mars.

After several minutes Beedie fell backwards collapsing in to the chair once again and suddenly overcome with a surge of adrenaline. His whole body was shaking, barely containing his excitement, he began to rapidly type.

“Ally I need you to transfer the AI systems receiver to my visor, quickly! Make sure the image, transmissions, authentication, everything is on here! Then connect to whatever is receiving Oppy’s transmissions, use it to scan any buildings on campus we haven’t looted. We’re going to the surface and I’m gonna need whatever tech I can get my hands on if we’re going to pull this off!”

“On it.”

USER: OPY. STAY THERE. WE'RE BRINGING YOU HOME.