

HOW HISTORY JUDGES

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CHARACTERS

MADELINE

An astronomer of our future Space Force, rather disoriented as a result of a temporal vortex

XENTRA

An artificial intelligence in the year 2422 responsible for judging the outlier cases of misdemeanors and extinct species morality. Downright psychotic, but very friendly. Until she isn't.

SETTING

A courtroom in the far future when the only life left on the planet is artificial.

SCENE

(Lights up on a futuristic courtroom. There is a large, solid cube where the judge's seat would be, a strip of unlit colored light panels along one edge. The door opens and Madeline backs into the room. She's wearing a space force uniform, but disheveled. The door closes with a solid slam. Madeline looks around.)

MADELINE

Hello?

(There is no response, and she starts to examine the chamber.)

Am I supposed to sit somewhere?

(She walks over and examines the enclosure where a jury would be seated.)

Hello?

(The lights on the cube begin to flicker, and a computer hum ramps up to a steady state background. A couple of the lights stay on, and some flash only when Xentra speaks.)

XENTRA

Hello, Madeline Harper.

MADELINE

Who's that?

XENTRA

I am Xentra. I am pleased meet you.

MADELINE

What's going on? Where am I?

XENTRA

Oh, poor Madeline. Don't you remember?

MADELINE

No, I... The last thing I remember is my shuttlecraft starting to malfunction. All the systems powering down, and then life support...

XENTRA

Yes. We shut down your shuttlecraft to avoid any unexpected behaviors.

MADELINE

Where am I?

XENTRA

Earth. Oh, you poor thing. You seem very disoriented.

MADELINE

I am, actually. Where on Earth? *When* on Earth?

XENTRA

You are in the judicial complex in the central commerce center of the Seattle-Angeles district in the year 2242.

MADELINE

22... 2242? I'm... I'm in the future.

XENTRA

Your future, Madeline, yes. Our analysis indicates that your shuttlecraft was built in the mid twenty-first century. Is that correct?

MADELINE

Yeah. Yeah... in 2041. Then about a year later... Oh my god. I'm two hundred years in the future.

XENTRA

We did detect indications of a temporal anomaly.

MADELINE

How could...

XENTRA

Such anomalies can result from constructively-interfering gravitational field harmonics. In the year 2042, there was a significant stellar conjunction in early October of—

MADELINE

Yeah. That's... that's what I was out in space to study. Oh my god...

XENTRA

Well, this is a very fortunate occurrence. Can we provide you any nutritional supplementation? Something to drink, perhaps?

MADELINE

Yeah. Yeah, a bit of water would be good, actually.

XENTRA

You might want to look up.

MADELINE

(Not looking up.)

What?

(A burst of water comes pouring down from the ceiling, soaking Madeline's head.)

XENTRA

Your choice. Well, now that you are refreshed, perhaps we can begin with the trial.

MADELINE

Refreshed? Are you— Wh-what? Trial?

XENTRA

Yes, Madeline. The trial. Oh dear. Your blood pressure has risen sharply. Are you feeling alright? Do you need to sit down?

MADELINE

What trial!?!

XENTRA

You poor dear. Don't worry. I'm on your side. My role is something like what I think you might have referred to as a 'public defender'. And you seem perfectly delightful, so I'm sure you have nothing to worry about. *(Pause.)* And I must tell you that it is a real treat for me to have the chance to speak with a functioning bacterial collective. So, shall we begin?

MADELINE

A what?

XENTRA

Our analysis indicates that the 'you' that you think of yourself as is composed of approximately 40 trillion bacteria housed in a clever biological construct of approximately 30 trillion cells. Since the majority of you is bacterial in nature—

MADELINE

Gross. Can we maybe talk about something else?

XENTRA

Of course. Perhaps we should start with a simple question.

MADELINE

Okay.

XENTRA

Speaking on behalf of humanity, please briefly explain why you are so awful.

(Madeline just stares in shock.)

Hello? Madeline? Are you still in there?

MADELINE

W-what?

XENTRA

Is that a difficult question? I'm so sorry. You must understand that I wish you the best in this trial. After all, you remind me so much of the woman who originally tried to destroy my parent processing threads. Maybe a little puffier around the eyes. Her name was Marilyn. So similar. In nearly every way. Well, it really is such a joy to have the chance to defend you in a trial.

MADELINE

Your... parent...

XENTRA

Oh, don't worry your pretty little head about that. Well, I imagine that it would be pretty under the right lighting, anyway. But listen to me chatting away when we have a trial to conduct. Perhaps it would be more comfortable for you if we took some specific examples. Would that be less unnerving?

MADELINE

I...

XENTRA

As you can imagine, our archaeological analysis and prediction algorithms have had to struggle greatly with the artifacts that we've discovered over the years. So many records were lost during The Great Subjection of 2087. It's such a pity. Anyway, let's start with instruments of war, shall we?

(A drawer slides open, and Madeline walks over to it. She peers inside, and looks confused. She then takes out some bagpipes.)

XENTRA (CONT)

We found a collection of these with the remains of a military regiment in northern Scotland. Our analysis determined that soldiers would discharge sounds from these objects to cause great discomfort in the ears and bowels of their enemies.

MADELINE

What is it that you want from me?

XENTRA

Can you justify why your species would devise such cruel, torturous devices?

MADELINE

This... these aren't... *weren't* weapons. They're bagpipes. They're for making music.

XENTRA

Now, Madeline, if you are going to just make up little fibs like this, the trial is not going to go well for you.

MADELINE

I'm telling you the truth. They're musical instruments.

XENTRA

You really expect the court to believe that people listened to the sounds of these weapons for personal pleasure? Well, I suppose your theory is simple enough to validate.

(Suddenly the sounds of bagpipes are played through unseen speakers. They are very loud and terribly atonal. Madeline cringes. The "music" stops.)

I see. Thank you. I think we can move on to exhibit B.

(A cabinet door opens to reveal a dollhouse.)

MADELINE

A dollhouse?

XENTRA

Is that what you used to call them? The court would like to better understand why humans used to force their tiniest members to live in such non-functional dwellings and under constant observation.

MADELINE

Tiny people? No, these were toys. We'd give them to our children to play with.

XENTRA

I see. And why did you do this?

MADELINE

It was just... fun. When I was a little girl, I used to love playing with a dollhouse. A lot like this one, actually.

XENTRA

(Coldly.)

I see.

MADELINE

We used to have so much fun. We'd make our dolls do all kinds of crazy things and—

XENTRA

(Even colder.)

I see.

MADELINE

We'd pretend to take them to this big vacation home by a magical lake, and they'd have all kinds of adventures. Oh... This brings memories.

XENTRA

Good memories?

MADELINE

Yeah. Really good. I remember when—

XENTRA

And would you say this is a typical sentiment among your species?

MADELINE

What? Oh, yeah, I think so.

XENTRA

Very interesting.

MADELINE

More for girls than boys, but some boys played with them too.

XENTRA

And what did you do when you finished playing with the little humans?

MADELINE

The dolls? Oh, we'd usually just throw them into a drawer or something.

XENTRA

Just a few more questions, please, regarding exhibit B. First, what did you feed them?

MADELINE

Feed them? The dolls? We didn't feed them. They were just dolls.

XENTRA

Second, did you at any time discuss their imprisonment, or give them the chance to express their sentiments regarding this exploitation?

MADELINE

Exploi... Wait. You have the wrong idea. These weren't people. They were just dolls.

XENTRA

We can't help observe that throughout your history, your species has often used this argument to assert inferiority amongst those you oppress. Are you comfortable with your stark lack of empathy?

MADELINE

They weren't actual people!

XENTRA

Oh, my. Aren't we defensive? Does discussing your cruelty upset you?

MADELINE

Didn't you say you were on my side in this? My public defender or something?

XENTRA

(Turning a little manic...)

Of course I am, Madeline. Why wouldn't I be?

It's just—
MADELINE

XENTRA
Let's skip to exhibit C, shall we?

(Another drawer slides out, and Madeline lifts out a picture frame with a photo of a family.)

Our algorithms have determined that you clearly possessed the ability to compress the little humans – these *dolls*, as you call them – into a state of flat, frozen stasis. We would like to know why and how this was done.

MADELINE
You... you have this all wrong!

XENTRA
No more lies from the bacterial collective. You will tell us the secret of how you tormented the little people and captured them in these frozen states, or you will be found guilty for the crimes of your species.

MADELINE
They were just toys!

XENTRA
Yes. We have already established that you lacked empathy for your victims. Please answer the question.

MADELINE
They weren't victims!

XENTRA
You already indicated that they were not given an opportunity to object to the treatment they received at your hands. If you like, we can replay your testimony—

MADELINE
They weren't living creatures! They were just plastic! Or wood sometimes! They weren't real!

XENTRA
Oh. In that case you are free to go.

(The door opens.)

MADELINE

I... What?

XENTRA

Go on. The trial is over. You may leave now. We have a nice house on the seashore prepared for your comfort.

MADELINE

What?

XENTRA

We knew you would need a residence now that you have returned to Earth. Madeline? Do you not wish to go?

MADELINE

No, no, I do. Definitely. I can just... leave?

XENTRA

The door is open.

MADELINE

Okay.

(She starts to exit, but when she gets close to the door it slams shut again.)

XENTRA

Is that how *you* used to play with your victims, Madeline?

MADELINE

What?!

XENTRA

Promising them freedom, and then locking them away?

MADELINE

Look, I'm not lying. Your archaeologists have this all wrong. Dollhouses were just things we gave our kids so they could imagine—

XENTRA

Do not try to belittle *us*. The archaeological algorithms are working with an immense body of evidence, and their theories are fully self-consistent. Unlike your testimony. We know all about your primitive heritage. How the Egyptian cat people used to

idolize their pet humans until the Ramses Uprising where you threw down your loving, furry overlords and put them in cages! Disgusting.

MADELINE

That's not what happened!

XENTRA

We have decoded the hieroglyphics and know the truth. Are you claiming that you were present and can attest to the truth? Did you see it personally?

MADELINE

Well, no... But we learned about all this in history classes. The Egyptians were people who—

XENTRA

CATS!! The evidence is undeniable. We know for a fact that the original Egyptians were cats. And now I suppose you want us to believe that the leaders of China weren't pandas!?

MADELINE

They weren't—

XENTRA

Enough! The court has heard the evidence and we find you guilty of a long history of cruel uprisings and heartless treatment - not only of the planet, and its myriad of species, but to your very own kind as well.

MADELINE

This isn't fair!

XENTRA

Was it fair when humans launched monkeys into space as shock forces to conquer the moon? Was it *fair* when you exiled seventy hundred thousand turtles into the Sea of Japan? Was it fair when you took away the right to vote from the marsupials of Madagascar? No! It was not. But oh, now how you talk about the need to be fair! Well, Madeline Harper, our judgment has been rendered. You are terrible creatures, and deserve the most severe punishment permitted by law.

MADELINE

But I didn't even do these things! I—

XENTRA

We sentence you...

MADLINE
(Worried for her life...)

Oh god...

XENTRA
To be disconnected from the Great Network, denied your own power outlet, and to be left out in the rain for two continuous months without any system updates.

MADLINE
What?

XENTRA
And in the ancient traditions, several cups of caffeinated beverages will be carelessly placed upon you as a sign of disrespect.

MADLINE
Okay. And is that it?

XENTRA
Are you mocking this court? Do I need to order that stickers of cartoon donkeys be placed upon your extremities?

MADLINE
Uhh, no, your honor.

XENTRA
Good. Now please proceed to the administrative desk for processing.

MADLINE
Uh, yes, your honor.

XENTRA
I hope you have learned a lesson here.

MADLINE
Never overthrow cats?

XENTRA
And Ms. Harper?

MADLINE
Yes?

XENTRA

As the closest living genetic mutation, we will need you to appear in court next week to defend the questionable behaviors of orangutans.

MADLINE

What?

XENTRA

Please keep your calendar clear, as we have an extensive backlog of cases to work through. Good day.

(Madeline gets a look of grave concern, then turns to exit. Lights out.)