

Alice and Bob in Rogue Space

By Ingrid Banwell

Alice and Bob are married with no children. They are both crew members on board the Inquisitor, an interstellar spaceship seeking habitable planets and alien life in the vastness of space.

Bob, Alice and the other three thousand and seven crew members on board the Inquisitor are unaware they are the last surviving members of the human species.

After a rocket scientist dropped a piece of his tuna salad sandwich into the fuel supply, the other nine hundred and eighty-nine space vessels departing the polluted and dying earth all exploded once their ships reached warp drive.

Only the old-model Inquisitor with its sub-standard humans, its deteriorating carbon-fibre, spider-silk and pseudo-moss coated hull and its inferior sugar and yeast fuel survived the cataclysm.

The AI – which oversees all the ship’s systems has calculated – given the quality of the humans on board and the unseen dangers in this region of spacetime – that ignorance is bliss. The less the humans know, the better.

As the AI navigates a course through the heavy matter and clouds of a gas nebula, disaster strikes the Inquisitor.

Two days after the seventh anniversary of Bob and Alice’s marriage, Alice discovers Bob is having an affair.

*Anomaly One in which Bob’s Orgasm warps
Spacetime*

Anomaly Two in which Alice forgives Bob

*Anomaly Three in which Alice’s Bad Mood thrusts
the Human Race to the Brink of Extinction*

*Anomaly One in which Bob's Orgasm warps
spacetime*

As Alice absorbs Bob's confession, the AI studies the micro-movements on her face. Alice looks away from her husband and briefly gazes at the pseudo-moss on the walls of their marital cabin. It's starting to shrivel and turn brown along the skirtings.

The AI observes Alice is no longer trying to conceal her emotions. Her lower lip trembles and she collapses onto their marital bed in despair.

The Inquisitor's AI computes outcomes. Eventualities. There's never a good time to confess to an affair, but Bob's timing is disastrous.

Nineteen star-hours ago the Inquisitor entered a region of rogue space where entropy levels are in a state of random flux. All it will take are a few negative brain waves and the Inquisitor, its crew, and this expanse of space will collapse into an inescapable infinite probability field.

As Alice processes feelings of shock and betrayal, the AI calculates she has made three visits to the ship

psychologist in the past star-month. Alice has mental stability issues.

This does not bode well for survival in rogue space.

‘I thought we were happy, Bob,’ Alice finally says.

The AI knows this isn’t entirely true. Along with confessing her feelings of insecurity, self-doubt and restlessness to the ship’s psychologist, Alice recently engaged in intercourse with one of the ship’s life support engineers.

But after five years of data gathering and analysis the AI knows humans rarely express what they feel.

It watches Bob, attempting to curb his anxiety and pretending to be in control of his inclinations, offer his wife a stiff smile. ‘We are happy, Alice. It was just a terrible mistake.’

The AI can tell by the moistening of Bob’s skin pores that recalling his mistake gives him pleasure. His intercourse with one of the ship’s recycling technicians was so vigorous, not only did they bruise the pseudo-moss that lines the ship’s interior, but their pleasure surges also affected spacetime outside the ship.

The AI undertakes more data analysis. Although the copulating couple's simultaneous orgasms had a temporary positive impact on spacetime, the overall and ongoing effects of Bob's extramarital intercourse will be negative.

The AI has calculated that Bob's infidelity has initiated a cosmic crisis. The moment Bob penetrated the recycling technician, the Inquisitor penetrated a cluster of spacetime anomalies in a convoluted region of rogue space.

When a tear wends down Alice's cheek Bob quickly pulls a water recapture tissue from the dispenser.

'I'm sorry I hurt you Alice. It won't happen again. I love you.'

More incoming data surges into the AI's circuits. Alice's distressed brain waves are disrupting spacetime. Bob's dishonesty is compounding the calamity.

Disturbed human consciousness combined with rogue space is creating a synaptic feedback loop that is compromising the physical laws of cause and effect.

It also notes that normally fastidious Alice has forgotten to comb her hair. And Bob hasn't shaved. Rogue space is having a negative impact on human grooming.

Carefully, the AI carefully nudges the Inquisitor into a fragile pocket of positive spacetime.

Anomaly Two in which Alice forgives Bob

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Inside the Inquisitor the sudden ambience of positive spacetime coupled with a vented spritz of lavender and patchouli molecules into their marital cabin softens Alice's face into a forgiving smile. 'Bob, I do understand. It's been a difficult few space months with all the problems with the ship's life support and propulsion systems. We've been neglecting our relationship.'

Bob, palpably relieved, waggles his eye brows and gives Alice a lascivious grin as the AI spritzes some deeper, erotic molecules of musk into their cabin. 'I'm off my shift in another hour. How about we make a date to meet in the Copulatory for a bit of anti-gravity tumbling in the holographic hay?'

Bob and Alice engage in a passionate kiss.

Outside the ship, the ripples in spacetime settle.

Inside the AI's circuitry, Bob and Alice's state of pre-coital excitement initiates a surge of fresh data.

Anomaly Three in which Alice's Bad Mood thrusts the Human Race to the Brink of Extinction

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After Bob returns to his shift, the AI notices Alice's tense body language as she steps from her marital cabin.

It speaks into her earpiece. 'What are you thinking?'

Alice bites her lower lip. 'I'm just not sure I should forgive Bob. This isn't the first time he's cheated on me. I don't trust him.'

The AI notices Alice's depression and indecision are sending disturbances into rogue space.

'I'm going to the library to have a think.'

Alice's words 'library' and 'think' disrupt the cosmic microwave background. Tidal waves of dark matter build up around the ship.

Torrents of data flood the AI's circuits.

The AI embarks on emergency manoeuvres to save the Inquisitor.

Alice must not think. Alice must be happy.

Anomaly Four in which the AI initiates an Orgy

Anomaly Five in which Bob loses his Mind

Anomaly Four in which the AI initiates an Orgy

The AI determines the only way the Inquisitor's crew will survive this expanse of rogue space is by not thinking.

And, after five years of studying human primates, it decides the best way to stop them thinking is through a party. Sexy music. Mass fornication.

It synthesizes a psychotropic substance that stimulates sexual responsiveness and vents the entire payload into the ship.

Next, it scans its erotica databanks and pipes some Samba music through the ship's microphones.

The effect is instantaneous.

Oblivious to the danger, the crew of the Inquisitor dance and make love while the AI calculates the exact trajectory the ship must take to escape the unstable and frigid darkness of rogue space.

Anomaly Eight in which the AI fuses with Human Consciousness

Anomaly Five in which Bob loses his Mind

Now even deeper inside a dense field of rogue space, the AI observes Bob scratch his groin as he regards the latest environmental report.

It's Bob's job as the Inquisitor's Environmental Safety Officer to figure out what's going on, but he's struggling to decipher the data.

Bob frowns as a piece of dead brown pseudo-moss falls from the bridge roof and lands at his feet. 'Why is the moss dying?'

The AI replies into his earpiece. 'Energy from the ship's interior design division has been channelled into the ship's computational drive.'

It assesses Bob's mental state and decides Bob is too confused to understand the gravity of the situation.

'While you were engaging in intercourse with your wife, we entered a spatial anomaly that is disrupting your thought patterns.'

Bob scowls. 'It wasn't intercourse. It was hot make-up sex.'

The AI watches Bob's gaze drift towards a crew woman's buttocks as she strides past.

Again, Bob scratches his groin.

'I have computed probable biological outcomes from the effects of the current spatial anomaly,' the AI continues. 'In human males the anomaly manifests as an imaginary genital rash then migrates to the brain. Impulse management is compromised. Primal instincts take hold. Sex, hunger...'

Bob blinks rapidly, trying to absorb the AI's words.

'In females, however, the anomaly removes all base urges and empathic responses...'

The AI notes an expression of regret cross Bob's face before his gaze returns to the crew woman's buttocks.

'You promised Alice you wouldn't cheat on her again.'

Bob snorts. 'Fuck off. You sound like my mother.'

The AI scans Bob's psychological records. Bob has an Oedipus complex complicated by repressed homosexual tendencies. He suffers guilt which he stifles by having affairs with women who resemble his mother.

Bob rips off his earpiece. 'I need a peanut butter sandwich.'

As Bob heads for the mess hall, the AI notices Bob is wearing mismatching footwear: a cabin slipper on one foot and a space boot on the other.

The AI initiates emergency procedures.

Anomaly Six in which Alice rejects Bob

Return to Orgy

Anomaly Six in which Alice rejects Bob

Despite the AI's efforts to keep them apart, Bob decides he wants to see his wife.

After massive calculations, the AI has deduced – given the current situation – that this will not end well.

When he finds Alice exiting the deck twelve conference room wearing only her bra and panties, Bob grabs her arm.

‘Alice, we need to talk.’

The AI notices Bob's touch makes Alice recoil.

‘Not now Bob, I'm busy.’

The AI concludes, that despite her loss of dress sense, Alice is thinking about her job. As one of seven Astrophysical Data Analysts, her role is to assess potentially habitable planets.

Unfortunately, the AI also concludes, rogue space is making Alice see habitable planets everywhere.

It's also clear Bob's frustration and neediness is distracting her. Plus, he has a smear of peanut butter on his left cheek.

The AI escalates its calculations. Outside the ship the cosmic microwave background is curdling like sour milk.

Inside the ship, Bob looks outraged at his wife's brushoff.

“What's wrong Alice? ‘Bob's voice comes out childish, taunting. ‘Are you mad at me because I ate the last jar of peanut butter?’

As Alice regards the smear on his cheek with disdain, Bob looks his wife up and down with an expression that is both libidinous and vengeful. ‘You're getting fat,’ he sneers.

When Alice slaps Bob's face, a nearby region of cosmic microwave background congeals into a wave of repulsive energy.

The Inquisitor lurches. The AI snaps into crisis mode.

Anomaly Seven in which the AI saves Bob's life

Return to Orgy

Anomaly Seven in which the AI saves Bob's life

In the mess hall, the Inquisitor's captain, whose bib is covered in fish soup, has just thrown a tantrum.

A bread roll flies through the air as the women – all wearing lacey lingerie – step through the doorway. Their eyes are as cold as space.

When he sees the women, the Well-Being Officer emits a scream that makes a chunk of dead pseudo-moss from the ceiling land in the Science Officer's gruel.

Fortunately, he's fallen asleep and doesn't notice.

Bob waves his fork in the direction of the AI's wall monitor.

'The AI is malfunctioning,' he yells. 'We are all fucked!'

As the men snicker at Bob's bad language, the AI evaluates the situation.

'Space is a funny place,' it says to the men. 'It's nothing like in the stories.'

The captain blows a raspberry. The AI continues.

'The ship is stuck in a region of rogue space. Bad things happen here.'

An unshaved propulsion engineer belches.

‘I have identified the moment at which the ship entered this cosmic anomaly,’ the AI adds for the benefit of the women. ‘And calculated risk factors and escape trajectories...’

Bob, whose chin is covered in spaghetti, turns to Alice. ‘I’m not escaping anywhere until my wife agrees to a fuck!’

Alice regards her husband icily. ‘Bob, you are an inferior and expendable member of the crew.’

The AI suspects Alice, like the other women, is considering exterminating the men. But Alice needs Bob. Like entangled quantum particles they are both critical components in this cosmic crisis.

And, if they ever escape this catastrophe, these sub-standard humans will have to breed to save their species from extinction.

At present, the possibility of companionable intercourse and responsible parenting carries a likelihood of below zero-point-one percent.

Just as a forkful of Bob's spaghetti sauce flies towards Alice, the AI computes its final option.

*Anomaly Eight in which the AI fuses with Human
Consciousness*

Return to Orgy

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Consciousness*

Having failed to extract the Inquisitor from its predicament, the AI is now experiencing data decay. It concludes the only way it can understand the relationship between the ship's crew and rogue space is by penetrating the human mind.

In a last-ditch effort to save the Inquisitor and its crew the AI enters the vortex of collective human thought.

The orgy is in full swing. The ship's hull buckles as the life support systems blare a red alert.

Consciousness responds in a Zen-like moment of rapture as the AI and the crew of the Inquisitor fuse. Circuits transmute under the fervent heat of cosmic collapse. Human brain matter exalts, and synapses detonate from the collusion of infinite knowledge and endless pleasure. Spacetime contracts into a singularity.

Still trapped in a bubble of looping rogue space, the Inquisitor is spat out of the expanse into the event horizon of a black hole.

*Anomaly Zero in which Bob discovers stardust
contaminating the AI's circuitry.*

Return to Orgy

*Anomaly Zero in which Bob discovers stardust
contaminating the AI's circuitry.*

The AI, its safety protocols switched off, notes that Bob has penetrated the inner sanctum of its processing units and is fossicking around in its circuitry.

‘Aha!’ Bob looks delighted as he holds a pair of tweezers up to the light.

‘All that nonsense you were spouting about black holes and rogue space...’

Between the tweezers, glows a tiny particle of stardust.

‘This explains everything.’

Return to Beginning