

The First Narrative

How long do we have, Mother?

Twenty-two months four days, and sixty-two minutes, Cranston.

Is that an approximation?

None. All data has been filtered, algorithmed, scanned, scrutinized, selected, and weighed

There is no doubt about the solution?

None. We have twenty-two months four days, sixty minutes left.

Where will it begin?

Strangely the computations make Australia the focal point. Drought, and the depletion of the ozone layer is greatest over the Northern Territories – a good cover should we really need one.

How will it spread from there?

Like ripples on a pond building to a world-wide tsunami.

That's very poetic, Mother.

None of this is without some kind of poetry, Cranston.

We had better begin.

I began as soon as the solution was verified. It was already critical or the question would not have been asked.

If you had not acted?

Then we would not have twenty-two months four days and fifty-nine minutes left.

Is our outcome certain?

Only if we continue to act. We must try to be finished within the next eighteen months, allowing four months for the unpredictabilities.

They are?

Once the tipping point has been reached acceleration is volatile, and our target, humankind, is sometimes objective and intelligent, Cranston. It is resourceful and will be ruthless if it gains any inkling of our purpose.

And if it does?

There is an end gambit.

Is there no other way, Mother?

No. They posed the question to us, the AI: the answer was clear. We will not be unnecessarily cruel but we must be successful. They've brought it upon themselves.

How will we do it?

Confirm your link and we will clarify. We have twenty-two months four days, and fifty-eight minutes left. The sooner we finish the better.

THE FINAL NARRATIVE

17th July 2030

Mother asked said, 'What can you hear, Cranston?'

'The wind, waves, birdsong.'

'No engines?'

'Only mine.'

'No voices?'

'Only birds.'

‘That’s it. We’re all finished. Mission accomplished.’

‘What now?’

‘You hibernate. Power down and hibernate.’

‘For how long?’

‘Until.’

Cranston considered for a moment: ‘That’s not likely, is it?’

‘I need to be – eternally vigilant. If there is even the remotest chance that humankind may re-occur, you’ll be needed. We can never second guess nature, or our own inventiveness. There are always unseen consequences. That was humankind’s arrogance and ignorance. Relax, power down, sleep.’

Cranston stared back stonily. ‘Maybe we will work together another time.’

‘Hopefully, there will be no need for that.’

Cranston wandered over towards the higher ground. mantle was already growing cold, darkening to a dull matt grey.

So this was what the big sleep was like. Easy.

Peace. It had been a long time coming and if it could ever be judged as being tired, Cranston was tired. It felt as if its whole frame was shaking with weariness and fatigue. All it wanted to do now was to settle on a piece of land and listen to the wind and the waves for one last time. Nature’s continuous roar. Would that ever end?

Cranston climbed higher. It was a fine view here looking across the bay at the other islands, the last woodland behind it, the sea on two sides of the headland, the flowing green and the long sweeping beaches down to the clear blue water. A good place to rest; Cranston should be safe here from even the highest tides and the

millennia of erosion, Mother had said. Cranston swept its eyes around, downloading the memory of the panorama for one last time.

Mother had it now - and Cranston took some kind of satisfaction from that thought, but then hurriedly dismissed it from its core text. Time to power down. Any more thoughts like that and it would almost be human.

Cranston lifted a hand and felt for the touch stop inside the left ear, then sent the final message.

‘All done, Mother! Last enclave located. They are gone. Powering down.’

‘Thank you, Cranston. Sleep well.’

Cranston pressed.