Twitter Thread by Zak, the Attempter



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The Board Meeting

The Board of Directors was caught in a deadlock situation. A secessionist state, called Freedom's Charter by its hard-bitten inhabitants, had somehow spawned almost overnight the month before.

It was causing the Societal Protectorate's Board of Directors no end of problems. The Board was still attempting to determine just how it had happened, but even more important was that it be ended.

And so they met, for the fourth time that month, in their dimly-lit conference room, with the various Directors seated around it, the walls lined with aides and functionaries of various levels.

The Board members had been deliberating for a little over four hours now, with no discernible progress.

One of the more junior functionaries started, almost imperceptibly, as his implant pinged, information scrolling up his vision.

Trained to rapidly assimilate such, the young man read and understood before stepping forward.

"We do have Marshall," offered the junior functionary. His voice was quiet, his tone a clear indicator of how well he knew the suggestion would be taken.

"Absolutely not," snapped the Director of Communications. "Do you have any idea of the panic that having a relic like Marshall would instigate in the public? The public relations toll alone would be a serious political setback."

The junior functionary lowered his head, about to step down, when the Director of Peace and Order threw in his two cents. "Director of Communications, if I may? Who says the public needs to know?"

The meeting room was silent for a long moment. "Pardon?"

The Director of Peace and Order smiled grimly, his teeth shining dully in the dim light. "Exactly as I said. We can pacify this insurrection with lethal swiftness, and little public outcry, if we simply don't inform the public."

The Director of Societal Well-Being rose to her feet, her face a mask of indignation. "Marshall is a Mk. 7 Venator, Director. The Mk. 7s are riddled with thought-processing flaws, not to mention their authority issues.

Let's not forget that's all on top of their alarming propensity to go absolutely Neanderthal at the drop of a hat...and you want to just unleash that on an unsuspecting populace? What societal good could that possibly serve!?"

"'An unsuspecting populace'?" echoed the Peace and Order, an amused grin on his saturnine face. He steepled his fingers in front of his face as he leaned back in his chair. "You make these dissidents sound like law-abiding citizens.

Didn't they determine that they were no longer a part of our society with their insurrectionist movements?"

"The possibilities for collateral damage are not to be ignored," replied Societal Well-Being. A cold snap, like ice, had tinged her voice.

"Regardless of the dissidents' position in legality, Marshall is not an asset we can deploy."

The junior functionary took the moment to step back into the shadows surrounding the conference room's table.

He had completed the task assigned to him by the mysterious Board of Directors, through one of their many factors. Why the Board worked this way, assigning lower-level associates to introduce controversial topics, the functionary didnt know.

He was willing to bet, in the back of his mind, that it had to do with the blame game.

"I think you will find that, channeled correctly, Marshall makes a fine asset," came the whisper-quiet voice of the Director of Philosophies.

"In my studies, I've found that people, even hardened criminals like Marshall, are easily pushed in the right direction if you simply have the leverage."

"And there's the problem," replied Societal Well-Being, not missing a beat.

"With Marshall, there is no leverage. His Venators are dead, his wife and children...emigrated...to Sentry a decade ago."

She paused, letting that sink in. Sentry was the Societal Protectorate's direct national opposition, and a constant thorn in their side.

The loss of Dr. Kadriel Marshall and her research efforts to the enemy had been a blunder that the former Director of Technologies had paid for quite heavily. After a suitable moment had passed, the Director of Societal Well-Being continued.

“His ties to the rogue A.N.T.-1 program were never strong enough to play on, even if we hadn't wiped that particular coding from the net in its entirety. And of course, we can't even offer him Tessera."

The Board was silent for a long moment, the memory of just what Kadriel had done to Tessera still vivid in their minds nearly two decades later.

"What about his freedom?" offered Philosophies, shaking himself from the grim remembrance.

“Obviously not his real freedom, but the illusion of it?”

Communications shook his head. “He'd never believe it, and rightfully so. He hates us, everything we stand for.”

Societal Well-Being sighed, her face pinched, eyes haunted. “He loathes everything that's right and good. Have you ever actually tried to talk to him?”

“I have,” replied Philosophies from across the table. “It was a...singularly fascinating experience.

His hatred is this palpable sort of thing. Like a venom. Were I lesser man, I might even find his words compelling. He talks about things like freedom, honor, nebulous concepts that we know mean little in the context of the greater societal good.”

“He has absolutely zero respect for our way of life!” The Director of Societal Well-Being's face was slowly turning red.

“Perhaps,” answered Philosophies. “Perhaps he simply doesn't understand it. He is, after all, nothing more than a soldier, and an outdated one, at that.”

“Thankfully, we don't have need for his sort of anachronism, 'soldiers', anymore,” said the Director of Technologies with a long, happy sigh. The Director of Peace and Order responded with a snort.

“Don't we? We have an insurrectionist movement occurring right here in the heart of the Protectorate, and you think we don't need soldiers?” Peace and Order shook his head, still smiling. “More fool, you.”

“Don't you start throwing ad hominems at me,” snarled Technologies. “You're dangerously close to an anachronism yourself, you little -”

“Enough!” interrupted Societal Well-Being. She smacked her hand down on the table as she came to her feet, fire in her eyes.

“Whether or not he's an anachronistic expression of imperialistic fervor is neither here nor there! It is not that this Marshall simply doesn't understand our ways; its that he understands them and rejects them, outright, and wholeheartedly.

He doesn't believe in any of the things we know are good, right, and true!”

“Well, what does he believe in?” asked Peace and Order, still smiling.

Philosophies shuddered. “Its both difficult to describe and best left unimagined. Believe me, Peace and Order, you don't want to know.”

Peace and Order shrugged. “I still think that deploying Marshall is our best bet.

One unattached asset, no real trace back to us – his technology is brutally out of date, after all – and his victory is practically guaranteed, is it not?”

“Wait,” Technologies seemed to perk up. “He can't be traced to us?”

“Not even a little bit. Oh, it'll be obvious he's government tech,” and here the Director of Peace and Order waved one hand negligently. “But whose government?”

“The public can simply subpoena access to the information, Peace and Order.

If we bar them, they'll suspect! Ridiculous idea.” Societal Well-Being sat back down in her chair, her arms folded, face still pinched.

“Do you recall the Artificial Logistics Interpretation and Control Emulation AI, Technologies?” asked Peace and Order, seemingly ignoring Societal Well-Being's declaration. Technologies groaned, rubbing his face.

“I do. Utter disaster. The program, Alice, as it was called, was intended to be a social control, covering a wide range of national interests.” Technologies shrugged. “However, it was destroyed when Tessera deployed it against the A.N.T.-1 program.

The A.N.T.-1 program was, of course, rendered inert and later removed entirely as a result of the conflict, but innumerable data was lost.”

“Indeed, it was!” laughed the Director of Peace and Order.

“All manner of files were corrupted into permanent inaccessibility, or even deleted entirely. Among those deleted files?”

Societal Well-Being's eyes widened, and she sat up, uncrossing her arms. “No.”

“Oh, yes indeed.” Peace and Order gave her a knowing nod. “The entire Venator program, even the Mk. 11s.”

“But we still use the Mk. 11S, don't we?” asked the Director of Communications. Peace and Order nodded.

“We do. Technologies and I were forced to rewrite more data than either of us care to consider, just to reestablish the program in the net.” Peace and Order shrugged expansively.

“If you rewrote the programs,” said Societal Well-Being through gritted teeth.

“Then of course its still traceable to us, you utter -”

Peace and Order held up a single hand. “Now, now, Societal Well-Being, lets not get overly-excited. Technologies and I aren't idiots. We didn't include those past failures in our records.

There's no point in documenting that sort of history.”

The Board nodded collectively. It was common practice, a tactic that kept the public safe, removing tainted concepts from the social consciousness.

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Peace and Order leaned back in his chair. “Follow this line of thought, if you will. We deploy Marshall to remove the leadership. We can drum up a few atrocities they may or may not have committed; the asset doesn't need truth, just motivation.

We deploy him, let him destabilize it, and watch the riots ensue as the power vacuum takes hold.”

“How, exactly, are riots in the city going to help anything?” snarled Societal Well-Being. “Do you even understand the concept of the greater societal good?!”

“And when the riots are in full swing, the people crying out and everything seemingly on a downward spiral, we send in Security Forces to stabilize the region, returning the area to, if I may, peace and order,” continued the Director of Peace and Order.

He grinned at Societal Well-Being. “And while Security Forces are doing their job, we bring in a squad of Mk. 11s to deal with Marshall. End state: no riots, no secessionist movement, and no, what was that phrase you used, Societal Well-Being?

Oh, right. No more 'anachronistic expression of imperialistic fervor'.”

“I have no response,” said Societal Well-Being after a long moment, her face a closed-off mask. “Yet.”

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