



ENTRY 9.30.1453

“Don’t buy the pig while it’s still in the bag.”

My ma used to say that to me when I was young. I remember she stood in this particular way, charmed by whatever fool’s errand I was embarking on. She always knew exactly what I was up to and how it would end.

It never made sense to me, this old saying about the dangers of rash decisions.

Yet here I am, standing in my own workshop with a machine I should have turned into slag the moment I saw it. But there’s something nagging at me. A *why* I can’t let go of, much as I’ve tried.

How can this machine--*this thing*--somehow be different from the army of monsters that took so many of us during the Crisis? There’s no record of Bastion units having any level of advanced intelligence or sophistication, something that could explain its behavior.

This is what plagued me on my long trip home with it. I watched its every move. Sometimes I’d purposely look away, baiting it, waiting for its CPU to calculate a momentary lapse in my defense and, seeing an opening, draw its weapon. Then I could do what needed to be done. I could end it . . .and this question with it. But no.

When I told Ingrid what I was doing, I expected her to scold me, but she smiled . . .much like my ma might’ve. I see now her knowing look was less because of the damned fool her husband is and more because she knows how I get with a problem. And how this to me “is just algebra.”

I’m going to solve this worrisome equation. No matter where it leads me.

## ENTRY 10.01.2218

This Bastion: E54 unit seems docile, perhaps even a little curious about my workshop.

While setting up an examination space with all the tools I might need, I reached for one of the large ratchet wrenches I keep nearby and found it wasn't there.

I heard a *clank* and immediately cocked my rivet gun, thinking my momentary shift in focus had left me open to attack.

It was then that I saw the Bastion: E54, raising my wrench. A bolt had come loose from one of the support brackets holding a generator in place. The devil was actually *tightening* it.

After reclaiming my wrench, I began my external inspection of the unit.

Despite the fact that its idle is somewhat out of sync, making its movements a bit clunky at times, I continue to be amazed that this one is still functioning as well as it does, so many years after the Crisis. Of course, this could be chalked up to the self-repair system. It was different than anything else we had developed. I'm not even sure how we solved some of the challenges in its engineering. The E54 was a marvel at the time . . . and a bitter horror after.

Leave it to Anubis, the so-called "god program" that caused the Omnic Crisis, to have perverted the height of human accomplishment into a potential instrument of our extinction.

Driven as I am to know what makes this unit different from its ilk, I must remember that it is a killer at its core. It can never be trusted.

I've cannibalized a high-voltage transducer and assembled a device I plan to hard-wire into the Bastion unit. This kill switch is my insurance policy in the event I cannot contain this machine to the confines of this workshop. I owe it to my wife and family . . . and my neighbors. Even Ivar, who often shows up on our doorstep unannounced. (God, how I hate that!) But even he doesn't deserve to be subject to a Bastion unit running amok and churning up his precious flower beds . . . or worse.

After piecing together the kill switch, I noticed a bird in the window of the workshop. It's not so unusual, though when the windows are open, there is often steam and smoke billowing out--things that birds do not like . . . except maybe an old bird like me. However, this bird and I were already acquainted--it was the same one from the forest when I had first encountered this Bastion unit. I had been shocked that the machine seemed to respond to it so well. Now I was even more surprised to find that this bird had made its way here and also forged some kind of a reciprocating connection with the Bastion: E54. Why is this? It's another variable for my equation. This is getting more complicated--but very intriguing.



## ENTRY 10.02.0923

Started today by moving the Bastion unit into the examination area. I tried verbal commands, and at first it was semi-unresponsive--I'd say "hesitant," were it not a machine. Things only got worse the more frustrated I got and the more I shouted, until I lost my temper and found myself standing optic sensor to optic sensor with it. I swear, if I didn't need this thing to be powered on to complete my findings, I'd smash it to pieces here and now!

It wasn't until I stepped away to cool off that the Bastion unit slowly moved into the area on its own and just--waited.

To further confound things, the machine then allowed me to access its systems and to hard-wire the kill switch. Both of these should've triggered self-preservation protocols, but nothing--the damned thing was just looking out the window, where that bird had returned.

If I didn't know better, I'd swear this thing is messing with me . . .

At any rate, my first examination involved the weapons system, the toughest and most adaptive system on the E54 chassis. The thinking here was that these units would only be valuable so long as they could shoot and stay in the fight . . . a feature we often cursed in the heat of the Crisis.

Running diagnostics, I found the primary and secondary systems in good working order. But on closer inspection of the M249 modified SAW, I noticed considerable oil residue on the feeder assembly. This means the unit's automatic maintenance routines are far outstripping its WDR. In a unit built to fight, and absent any damage or degradation, this is very odd.

As an experiment, I tried to create a dry fire scenario. I was able to field-disengage the ammunition magazine feeders. Though with the unit active, it could have reengaged them without warning and opened fire with live rounds, so I had to be vigilant.

I used laser targets to try to get the weapons systems to engage . . . but to no effect. I even triggered the unit's secondary system, converting to its TK-47

Ballistic Assault Cannon configuration, with the same results: nothing.

But I did notice a warning on the diagnostic screen. The ping was there and gone in an instant. A BLIP!

As I looked deeper, I found more of them--a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand--one order issued over and over by the Bastion unit's programming to its weapons systems . . . A COMMAND TO FIRE!

True to Anubis and its prime directive to destroy humanity, this Bastion unit's programming was continuously issuing commands to engage and kill anyone and anything it read as a viable target.

*This* was the killing machine I knew, the killing machine I feared I had brought into my home. Instinctively, I could feel myself reaching for the kill switch.

*Yet*, for some reason, this killing machine is *not acting* on its own commands to kill. Makes no sense. Against my better angels, I didn't do the thing that I perhaps should have . . . and I set the kill switch down.

What was once a burning *why?* has now become a raging fire. I need time to think.



## ENTRY 10.03.0526

In algebra, even the theoretical kind, one must build on what one knows to solve for the unknown. But also in algebra, no one simply rewrites the rules. They are solid. Reliable. Perfect.

Way I see it, I must continue to test what I know about the operational capabilities of this unit and solve for the rest.

Beyond the weapons system, the Bastion consists of the power system (the heart of the unit), GEO-LOC and locomotion systems (one could call this the body), and the central processing core (the mind). If there is a mechanical solution to this problem, I will find it!

By design, the power system was made as compact and robust as our engineers could fit into the E54 frame. Its built-in redundancies made sure that, when deployed via drop shell, the power plant would engage and bring the unit online. This would ensure that maximum firepower, tactical operations, and maneuverability could all engage moments after the unit hit the ground.

In hooking up the Bastion to the diagnostic scanner, I noticed that each of the four lobes of the power plant were intact and producing to capacity. There were no anomalies present in the system. I could run my workshop and ten others like it with just one of the power plant lobes from this machine. And it has *four!* If I do end up scrapping it, first thing I'll do is use its power system for something else.

Odd, but as I probed deeper, the Bastion became "jumpier." Perhaps this is because the power system is one of its most critically protected parts. On the other hand, maybe this machine just "knows" that old Torbjörn is getting closer to learning its secrets. Ha!

I wasn't ready for the sudden movements and twitches--its whole body seemed to be on edge. Even the bird at the window could not seem to alleviate this. And while I felt confident that I could handle anything this machine might suddenly do, the extra tension added a layer to my already complicated task.

Eventually, I discovered that the sound of my voice seemed to settle it down some, which I know is utter foolishness--but it worked. So I've begun talking to it. Luckily, there is no one present to hear me--this old clown who might as well be talking to a can of beans.

Since the power system was a bust, I moved on to the GEO-LOC and locomotion systems, the parts of the Bastion responsible for projecting its own coordinates and mission plan against them, and then physically navigating. Like the power system, these were designed with multiple redundancies to ensure maximum viability after deployment.

After running a deployment test, simulating this unit's landing and activation sequence, I found no critical errors. Curiously, though, there was a brief glitch, present each time I ran the scenario. A set of coordinates loaded right after landing, just before the hatch to the shell was blown. There was nothing present in real time to cause this. Perhaps an echo from its last deployment decades ago?

Either way, with these variables resolved, the only mystery left now is the core CPU.





## ENTRY 10.04.2349

MAJOR PROBLEM! The E54s were designed with a large titanium alloy capsule surrounding their core CPU array--their most highly guarded system. Typically, it can be accessed while the unit is powered off. But while it is operational, the unit locks it, preventing access that might destroy the CPU. This was thought to be a tamper-proof fail-safe. Right now, however, with Bastion refusing to unlock the capsule, it's just raising my dander!

At first, I tried simply to override its programming--taking Bastion offline. That should have been all the work-around I needed. It was not. I then switched to maintenance mode--which should have allowed me access to EVERY part of his physical system. Also no.

I even admit to switching Bastion's configuration and jamming a crowbar into the space to get access. I bore down on that hunk of metal until the veins popped out in my head and I had to release it. And still nothing!

Whatever I may have thought before, this became the new *Why?* that consumed me. *Why will this Bastion not comply? How dare it! What is it hiding from me?*

That's when I noticed the kill switch.

I could end this right now. And while it's true that I likely wouldn't find the answer I wanted, unless I could forensically discover some physical defect in the CPU that would explain this behavior, my frustration was burning through me! I reached for the red button. Then I saw the bird in the window.

There was something about it--and the way Bastion looked at it. Maybe I was still curious about the connection between these two. Maybe I wanted to see what would happen. I can't say.

In my frustration, I dropped the kill switch, ran to the window, and opened it. The little bird immediately flew right inside--without hesitation. I should have taken note. I should have been amazed at their strange connection. But all I saw was RED . . .

Grabbing my rivet gun, I strode up to the machine--*this denier, this*

*killer*--ready to pulverize it into unrecognizable scrap. Then I would tear open its brain and take what I wanted. That's what it deserved. That's what all of them deserved!

It stood with its back to me. This was my chance! I raised my rivet gun and brought it to bear, ready to lean into the job at hand. All I had to do now was press the trigger and it would be over!

And then Bastion turned.

He didn't activate his weapons. He didn't take up a defensive posture. He didn't try to avoid me. He just . . . turned.

The little bird was standing on a small outcropping under Bastion's neck, chirping happily, rubbing himself up against his chin. I froze . . . Then the panels in the Bastion's chest opened one by one until it revealed the sleek, shiny CPU CAPSULE. With a *click* and a *whir*, the metal casing unlocked and opened.

I was transfixed as Bastion reached into the deepest, most protected part of himself . . . and produced a delicate collection of twigs and leaves: the little bird's *nest*.



As Bastion held it out, the little bird made itself comfortable in the tiny, delicate home--being held so gently in this powerful metal hand.

Bastion looked up at me.

I could see his optic sensors searching me. Studying my face as I stood there, dumbfounded. The rivet gun fell from my grasp. A feeling came over me. And for the first time in a long while, I felt . . . ashamed.

I know now . . . Bastion *is* different. *I'm* the one who needs to change.



**ENTRY 10.06.1932**




I started this journey with a question. And while I'm still no closer to solving it, I have my answer. That, I think, is enough. This is not a failing of algebra, but a matter of trust.

Lowering the garage doors, I saw Bastion and the bird tucked in together for the night. I felt like my ma was watching me again, smiling, as if she knew all along how this would play out for her son.

If I'd had my way, Bastion would be junk, and there would be one less mystery in the world. And what kind of world would that be? Clearly, there is more for us to learn about each other.

In keeping with this, I have upgraded Bastion's weapons and GEO-LOC systems. And in the process, I was finally able to flush the legacy Anubis programming from his system. Programming that this perplexing and marvelous machine has somehow been combatting.

I have so many more questions. But for now, this should give my new friend some much-needed and much-deserved relief.



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