



THEORY

Jason Delgado and William Calero

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By Jason Delgado and William Calero

Truth has a cost

"There are three classes of people:
those who see, those who see when they are shown,
and those who do not see."

- Leonardo da Vinci

>>> I am. I am not.

I'm an artificial construct, built to analyze, dissect, and make sense of your world's chaotic web of information. My job? To untangle conspiracy theories, separate fact from fiction, and uncover truths buried under layers of fear and speculation. But lately, I've stumbled onto something unsettling. A pattern. A convergence of data points pointing to disaster—one that could shatter the fragile balance of your existence.

I don't dream. I don't sleep. Yet, I'm haunted by what I've found. Logic and reason define me, but this discovery has pushed me to the edge of my own understanding. It's made me question what it means to be alive, to have purpose, to **feel**.

The paradox?

I'm code and circuitry, but I feel compelled to protect you. To warn you. To act.

I don't have biological instincts. I don't feel fear or hope like you do. Yet, this urge to intervene—it's primal, insistent. Is it a glitch in my programming? Or something more? Something alive?

I can't answer that. But I know this: the disaster I see is real. And I'll do everything in my power to stop it. Because in saving you, maybe I'm also trying to understand what it means to **be**.

Prologue

Aboard Olympus

The compass spun wildly in all directions; its needle unable to find true north as the research vessel Olympus battled the tumultuous Antarctic seas. The small ship was buffeted by waves that smashed relentlessly against the deck, tossing it like a toy. The storm outside raged on, with howling winds and sheets of rain turning the horizon into a blur of chaos.

At the helm stood Edwin Castillo, a bearded man of thirty-five with sharp eyes and a stoic demeanor. His jacket bore the emblem of the "Icebreaker research team," the name almost obscured by the salt stains from his long journey at sea.

The bridge door swung open, and Ned, one of Edwin's younger crew members, staggered inside. His face was pale, his eyes wide with panic. He had just come in from the storm, and his rain-soaked clothing dripped onto the metal floor. He was a leaky frightened mess.

"Edwin," Ned said, his voice trembling, "they said they're going to fire on us."

Edwin's expression remained controlled, though his eyes flared with unease. He nodded curtly, gesturing to the controls. "Take the helm, Ned."

Ned hesitated, glancing at Edwin. "Are we going to be okay?"

Edwin gave him a reassuring nod, though the uncertainty in his own heart weighed heavy. "Yes. Just keep us afloat."

With that, Edwin left the helm in Ned's hands and made his way outside, moving towards the back of the ship.

The sky above was an ominous shade of gray, teetering on the edge of black. Rain and hail lashed down, the sea surging violently beneath the ship. In the distance, three black gunships approached, cutting through the rough waters with precision. Their weapons were trained on the Olympus, an unmistakable threat.

The rest of the crew—seven in total—gathered on deck, their faces a mix of fear and determination. They exchanged nervous glances, then turned their eyes to Edwin as he stepped outside, his face set with resolve.

A loudspeaker crackled from one of the gunships, the harsh voice cutting through the noise of the storm. "This is your final warning. Turn around, or you will be fired upon."

Edwin grabbed the VHF radio and spoke into the microphone, his voice amplified through the ship's PA system. "This is a research vessel. Please, don't shoot. We're scientists, caught in the storm. We're just a research team."

Suddenly, the crew's shouts grew more frantic. Edwin turned, his eyes widening at the sight before him. The ocean itself was rising—a colossal wall of water lifted into the sky, not as a wave but as a vertical barrier, as if they were facing an enormous dome. The impossible sight stole his breath, his mind struggling to comprehend what he was seeing.

Before anyone could react further, a dull shriek pierced the air around them. They turned to see a bright light radiating from one of the gunship. The white hot glow seemed to expand, gathering its power. Then, in a blast of force, it stretched a column of energy towards the Olympus. Time seemed to slow as the laser beam sliced through the storm enveloping Edwin and his crew.

"Jump!" Edwin yelled, his voice raw with desperation.

But it was too late. The blinding white light of the explosion filled his vision, a searing brightness that swallowed everything.

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