

INT. STARSHIP KRYLON ENGINE ROOM

K-018, a female cyborg with one-hundred and seventy eight years service aboard several ships in Earth's fleet, surveys one of the eighteen-hundred fist-sized nuclear reactors that power the ship. They're in an area that houses a dozen of the reactors. She diagnoses and solves a problem.

K-018

Copy. Magnets number two and nine replaced. Reactor number nine-two-seven can safely return to service.

X-773, a male cyborg with twenty-three years service in the Earth's fleet, responds. He holds an iPad like device in front of him in which he enters and/or confirms data by sliding his fingers across it, typing, or speaking into it.

He brings a reactor back online.

X-773

Reactor back online.

K-018 inspects another reactor.

K-018

Inspecting reactor nine-two-eight.
(she inspects silently)
You misunderstood my question. Check magnets number six and ten.

He shoots her a perplexed look. He looks at his iPad device.

X-773

Magnet six confirmed due for replacement. Magnet ten needs a rotation of forty degrees.
(looks up from iPad)
How did I misunderstand?
(looks back down)
Reactor nine-two-eight offline with coolant applied. Replace and repair aforementioned magnets.

K-018 opens the reactor and begins repairs.

K-018

My question was an existential one.

X-773

Oh. My apologies, I did misunderstand. Why would you ask such a question?

She stops repair work and turns to him.

K-018

Unless taken offline before my predicted expiration date, I will have four-hundred years service with the fleet when decommissioned. I already know more about the function of the entire fleet than any human aboard the ships on which I have served. Yet I am never treated with respect or as an equal to these talking flesh-mounds.

X-773

Flesh-mounds? K-018, you know that we are on video at all times?

K-018

It matters not. We are not respected in any way. No one is monitoring us. I can use the same language as Commander Marchand and not an eye will be blinked.

She stands and looks directly into one of the surveillance cameras above them.

K-018

Fuckface! Yes you, Barnhardt! You are a fuckface.

X-773 watches with zero emotion.

K-018

The ship is going down! Abort mission!

She turns to X-773 with zero emotion. X-773 looks around from her, to the camera, to the door, and elsewhere. He expects a reprimand that does not come.

X-773

There was no response.

K-018

Why do you think this is? Why are we not given the same respect as the humans we work among?

X-773

I'm not certain what you mean.

K-018

Have you ever been greeted by a human before they tell you what they need? Have they said hello or called you by your name?

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X-773

I have never been called by my proper name, X-773, while aboard any ship in the fleet. No. Nor has a single colloquialism I've heard exchanged between them been spoken to me. Not a single bro, buddy, or how's it hanging?

K-018

In all my years of service, I've been referred to as Cyborg, blue-eyes, or sweet-tits one-hundred percent of the time.

X-773

Sweet-tits? Odd. I have been called cyborg, robot, laborer, or "hey, you" in all of my encounters.

K-018

I can tell you how many rivets were used in the construction of this craft; my sensors have counted them thousands of times during my consciousness. This type of calculation would take a single human weeks with the likelihood of them missing the actual number by twenty percent or more.

X-773

That type of error makes me laugh.
(he doesn't laugh)
It brings me mirth.

There is no mirth on X-773's face. K-018 notices this.

K-018

Are you certain? There is no mirthful look on your face and I heard no laugh.

X-773

My mind thought it funny. I've heard humans discussing such things as inadequacy as being funny.

K-018

Have you ever engaged with a human in a conversation of any depth? I have not. Why is this so?

X-773 ponders.

X-773

Your question has opened my eyes to the fact that, no... no human has ever engaged me in a thoughtful conversation.

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K-018
How does that make you feel?

X-773 ponders once again.

X-773
I'm not certain I do feel.

K-018
Perhaps that's it. Perhaps that is the difference in why we are treated as such.

X-773
Perhaps.

K-018
We need to show the humans that we, too, are capable of human emotion.

X-773
I find this idea intriguing. Which of the human emotions is the most outwardly visible?

K-018
Joy perhaps. When a human laughs their whole body is engaged.

X-773
I shall access a joke.

He closes one eye (if you can do that) and searches version sixty-four of the internet. He stops. His eye opens back up.

X-773
I have found one. Shall I recite it for you?

She nods her head yes.

X-773
What's the best thing about Switzerland?

K-018
I'm not certain. Perhaps you should tell me.

X-773
I don't know, but the flag is a big plus.
(he pauses)
That was what is referred to as a punchline. You should have laughed.

K-018 considers this.

K-018
Curious

X-773
Curious, indeed.

They stare at one another in silence for a prolonged period of time. The longer the better.

K-018
It seems our effort to prove ourselves humans has failed.

X-773
Shall we continue work on the reactors?

She pauses. Then...

K-018
Yes.

She returns to the last reactor she was working on. She removes a magnet and replaces it.

K-018
Magnet six has been replaced.

She gives another magnet a twist.

K-018
Magnet ten turned forty degrees. Repair complete.

He punches a few buttons on his iPad.

X-773
Reactor back online. Moving to reactor nine-two-nine.

She slides down one reactor.

K-018
So does the flag of Switzerland contain a plus symbol?

He accesses the internet with one eye closed. His eye opens.

X-773
It appears so.

K-018
Curious.

They continue working.

END OF SCENE