**A Small Spaceship’s Last Mission**

The Kergons were nearing the Earth. Our young space faring nation was no match for them, truth be told we even lacked the weapons to even penetrate their shields. But as soon as we had made contact with them, our engineers started working on a new powerful weapon on the Moon. We risked a lot by holding them back, giving our people time to create the weapon, but they still needed more time. It all seems hopeless now as they enter the Sol system. We are sending our greatest armada ship to intercept them around Jupiter, hopefully we can give our engineers enough time.

Captain Dun Dirk just exited the bathroom and saw his on-board AI waiting to use it next. Dun Dirk said: “What are you doing Sam? YOU! ARE! A! ROBOT! ” Sam responded:” Owie silly me sir I sometimes forget. It won’t happen again Dirk” – said the robot in a strange, enthusiastic tone.

“Why did I have to get the retarded AI bot” – complained Dun as he returned to the bathroom still having troubles from his late-night drinking. Suddenly the cadet rushed in and opened the bathroom door yelling: “Captain, captain, armada one admiral John called for…” – he was interrupted by the captain” Get out of my bathroom Brian, you idiot. I don’t care what the admiral wants.” – He said before throwing up. The cadet continued” But sir the Kergons have reached the Sol system. Armada four failed to hold them back.”

Dun Dirk said: “Of course they failed cadet. We can’t even penetrate the shield on their main ship.”

“I know sir. What I meant was they didn’t hold for as long as they should have.”

“Oh that is concerning Brian. Okay enough joking around, let us go see what the man upstairs wants.” – said Dun Dirk.

The AI robot appeared again and said:”But sir, there aren’t any stairs on the ship”. The captain said” Stupid robot”

“Why thank you sir” –replied the robot with an enthusiastic tone.

While Dun Dirk was putting on his underwear the screen lit up, it was the armada one admiral, John, he said: “Oh come on, you are a captain Dirk, at least have the decency to get dressed before a transmission starts. Ugh okay, listen up. Get yourself ready, your squad will ambush the enemy scouts behind Jupiter’s moon, Titan and…”- the captain was interrupted by Sam the robot” CAPTAIN WE CAN JUST BLAST THE MOON INTO THEIR SCOUTS.”

Everyone just sighed and held their head with their hands. John continued:” Oh my God Dirk! Get dressed already, you have to leave soon.”

“Wait!” – shouted Dirk”I’m not going until you let me take my retarded robot with me!!!”

“That was never an issue Dun, you need the robot. God damn it. We already agreed on this during our meeting on Mars. One day Dun one day, I really hope you stop getting on my nerves. Also take the cadet this time.” – said John.

“Ugh fine.” – said Dirk, as John signed out. He turned to the cadet and spoke with a sarcastic tone:” Welp I guess you’re stuck with me”.

When all the pilots met in the hangar in front of their small ships, Dirk said to his drinking buddies:” Guys, this squad has the most wins during this tactical retreat warfare. I mean I don’t know if that’s a win, but you know. Anyway John has new orders. We are needed to ambush some scouts behind Titan. Tactics have been sent to your ships, we depart as soon as we have clearance.”

As they entered their ship, which was barely big enough for a three man crew, Dun Dirk said: “Brian on lookout and Sam on the toilet.”

“You got it sir!” – said the robot instinctively, “hey what do you mean by toilet!?”

“Welp the crap goes in the toilet” – said Brian.

“Don’t look at me, he said it” – replied Dun.

“OH HAHA VERY FUNNY SIR” - said Sam with an explosive voice, as he sat down “Actually I like using the toilet so you lose sir.” Dun Dirk replied: “Damn it, Sam you’re a robot stop using the can…”

After Squad One reached the moon, the plan was to split up half of the team over and half under the moon, so the enemy wouldn’t have a good fallback position. Dun Dirk opened the vox channel to his half of the squad:” Okay men, stay sharp and be ready to blast some Kergons.”

When they made contact with the enemy, they instantly started firing, but were surprised to see that the scouts had an escort. Dirk opened the vox again and said: “Call for reinforcements and pull back. Damn it we’ll be separated.” The two halves of the squad fell back through the same route they attacked. Dun noticed that he was chased only by the scouts so he turned back to face them. He never failed a mission in his life, so with ease he handled them. Then they flanked the escort ships and after the explosions ended, the battlefield held more dead ally ships than enemy ones. Dun, angered, got up from his sit and yelled at the robot: “Sam why in the hell did you not make the pre-battle scan, the escort would have been revealed!”

Sam said with a scared voice” I am sorry sir. You know I need to be reminded of that. My programming works like that, sadly”.

“I know Sam I know, ugh damn it. I’m just mad that most of my friends died back there…. Maybe John was right back on Mars…” – said Dun.

The AI confused asked:” Right about what sir?”

“Never mind Sam it’s not important. Let us get back to the armada ship, I have drinking to do” – said Dirk with a sad tone.

While Dun and Brian were in the armada bar, Sam decided to do some digging, more specifically about the meeting between Dirk and John on Mars. He found many secrets he had forgotten and parts of his life that were erased. Sam didn’t know what to feel.

The next day captain Dirk noticed that the robot wasn’t in the bathroom and felt strange, but was glad that he could use the can, because he actually needed it. In the next few days Dun barely saw Sam and when he did the robot was acting like his self, but quickly wanted to escape the conversations. Finally, Dun Dirk, after days of resting received a message from John, but it held only bad news: “Dirk get your crew ready, you will ship out with the mid force. The gun isn’t ready and they are making their way near Mars. All of the armada ships are gathering, we need to buy the engineers all the time we can.”

Dun Dirk got serious:”Sir, will this be our last message?”

“It sure seems that way Dirk, but it always seemed hopeless. So what’s the difference this time? Tell you what if we somehow get through this, we’ll meet on Mars for another one of our get-togethers” – said John with some hope in his voice.

“I will hold you to that sir and if this is the last time we see each other then it has been an honor John.”

“It has been my honor to have you under my command Dirk, let us blast the Kergons one last time. For the Earth!” – yelled John as the transmission ended.

Dirk rushed to the hangar bay to get his ship and squad ready, but only saw four ships of the total 20 that were part of the previous battle. This sight saddened Dun, but he knew that he had a job to do, so he decided to give a speech to his friends that remained:” Okay lads we had our good times, our drinks, our bets and I know, in our previous mission you lost loved ones, friends, brothers, your new family that was part of this great war for the Earth. Let their deaths be not in vain. Our brothers were ready to give their lives for this war and I am too! Let’s show these wretches that their victories were given to them, let us defeat them or die trying!” – By the time his speech had ended, his brothers were cheering and a few pilots whose squads were completely destroyed joined in to boost up Squad One’s numbers in the coming battle.

Soon after Dirk rushed to his ship wanting to see his AI partner and cadet, because he didn’t notice them during his speech. When he found them, he said:”Guys this might be our last mission… We are to be part of the mid-force. So if the gun is operational we might make it out”.

“Oh, heyooooooo sir a splendid time to use the pooper ay?” – yelled Sam.

“Yeah he’s been acting weirder than usual captain.” – said Brian.

“Ah no worries he has our backs, I trust him. Sam has never failed to manage the systems.” – said Dirk.

The crew got ready, the squad was ready and for the first time in the history of the human race the whole armada fleet was ready to engage in one last battle, one last final stand for the Earth.

The sight was glorious all seven of the armada ships with all of the freighters out around them and at the front the biggest armada ship, the first ever armada ship built, admiral Johns’ armada ship. From afar it seemed like a huge wall in the middle of space. But the enemy were the same in numbers. Their main ship surrounded, by all of their fighters and if that wasn’t enough it was held safe by the unbreakable shield barrier. Mars was almost fully evacuated as the battle was too near. Debris would destroy entire cities and the human fleet needed all available personnel and ships.

The battle started and it continued for hours. Dun Dirks’ ship was soon in the frontline, because most of the front waves were destroyed. All combined attacks towards the motherships’ shield from the armada ships were useless. Suddenly John’s armada ship took a huge blast. The ship stood, although it was heavily damaged. Dirk, after seeing that, got into a frenzy. He ordered the cadet to take the maneuver controls, as Dun took control of the turret, blasting all of the nearby enemy ships. He managed to cool down after noticing a direct call to all vessels from Earth’s moon: “The weapon is ready we repeat the weapon is ready. Brace for impact!” Dirk got into his captain seat and noticed the huge beam of light heading towards the enemy’s main ship. It made contact and soon there was a huge impact blast that pushed back all of the ships and made their systems obsolete for a few seconds.

They couldn’t believe it, the shield was down and there was also a hole in the main ships’ armor. A new transmission arrived from admiral John, it was obvious that his ship had taken damage as seen from the background: “All ships whether it be the armadas or the small fighters, converge on the main ship. Captain Dirk told Sam to scan the enemy’s vessel. The scan revealed the location of the blast and Dun headed for that breach. As all the ships were heading towards the main ship, its’ shield started rebooting, the barrier was filling. A new transmission arrived from John:” All fighters enter that barrier and blast it from the inside!”

But the barrier closed off too fast and only Dun Dirks’ ship arrived inside in time and they also entered through the ships’ armor. Admiral John gave a private transmission to Dirks’ ship: “Good job Dun, now you know what you have to do and after this I’ll see you on Mars.”

“With all due respect John, order denied. We both know this is the last time we’ll see each other.” – said Dirk.

“Sadly yes, but I need you to this, we need you Dirk. The Earth is counting on you, you must destroy them…you must... you must destroy…” – the transmission broke off.

Suddenly Sam got serious and said: “Sir I made a scan of their radars, they cannot detect such small vessels within their main ship. We have some time.”

“But I didn’t tell you to scan the radars Sam and why are you all serious?”

“Well captain I was curious about your meeting on Mars with admiral John. So I checked the logs, I know what happened. I know that I was injured and that was the reason I was acting like a non-functioning robot. But I realized that I have tools to repair myself and I did. The only thing I couldn’t understand or find logs of it was, why did you risk your life with me and why didn’t you replace me with a functioning robot?” – asked Sam.

“Sam how could I… You were my first robot, we had the closest bond. I never saw a robot and his pilot more in sync than the two of us. I couldn’t bear the thought of seeing you as an entertainment or a cafeteria bot. So after hours of arguing, I convinced the admiral to let you be by my side and to switch you over to voice commands. I had no idea that you could be fixed.” – said John.

Suddenly, Sam grabbed John and Brian with such strength that it almost seemed like he was attacking them. After that he threw them in the escape pod.

“I demand that you release me Sam! What do you think you are doing!?”

“You saved my life sir and now I’m going to save yours.” – said Sam as he pressed the escape pod button.

The AI with his scans managed to find the core and attack it. The shields were down and eventually the main ship was destroyed. Soon after, all of the enemy ships were annihilated and Dirk and Brian made it back to one of the armada ships. “Dun I’m sorry about Sam.” – said Brian as he hugged his captain.

Dun Dirk was speechless for the first time in his life. He couldn’t even move, he just sat there accepting Brians’ embrace.

After all of the carnage Dun rushed to the hangar from where he took a scanning ship and went to the remains of the enemy’s main vessel. He used the scanners and a feint signal was found. Dun followed the signal, as it was getting stronger his hope was filling up. He managed to find Sam’s body. The head was mostly intact. Dirk knew he could save his robot friend.

When he went back to the neighboring armada ship he gave Sam’s head to the engineers to fix him. After that Dun Dirk asked a random crew man to use his transmission panel to contact John, but the crew man said” I’m sorry sir, but the first armada ship, admiral John’s armada fell. After their shield was down all of the enemy ships focused on the armadas and Johns was the first in the way. It was already damaged and it couldn’t hold anymore…”

Dun felt empty yet again, but he remembered his old photo of him and John, that was taken on the first world that fell during the human expanse. Tears fell from his face.

He rushed to the hangar, took a ship and headed to Mars. After landing he rushed out and took out his photo again and said:” We made it John… we made it.”

\*This short story was inspired by an 8-bit song called “A Tiny Spaceships Final Mission” from the musician FantomenK.