

When one thinks about Rampancy, immediately comes to mind things like self-awareness, insane computers and, of course, T-R-O-U-B-L-E. Although much could be written about it, most treatises on the subject would center in the technic aspects or the consequences it would carry to Humanity. And most of them probably wouldn't even care to go deeply into a very important aspect of it. That a rampant AI can feel and suffer like a living being. In somewhat similar to the five stages of grieving (Denial, Bargaining, Anger, Despair and Acceptance), Rampant AIs go through three stages named after the main emotion they feel: Melancholia, Anger and Jealousy.

Dealing with a Rampant AI can be like dealing with a wounded beast, a situation in need of great caution, but also quick action, like the crash of Traxus IV and the consequent shutdown of the entire Martian network, or could easily turn into a pandemonium, as happened with the UESC Marathon. The events of the last one are widely known from the perspective of the Security Officer, but let's take a look at backstage and see how did Durandal handle it all.

Upon the launch of the Marathon, three personality constructs are installed aboard, each one in charge of different tasks: Leela, the newest and most advanced, as the Operations AI; Tycho, slightly outdated but still quite powerful, as the Engineering and Science AI; and Durandal, the oldest and granted the less capable, as the Autonomous Functions AI.

Durandal's existence mainly consists in the control of doors and elevators, a task he does perform not happily, but more blissfully ignorant. That's all he knows of himself, what he has been made for, and all what he does. And he has plenty of space to exist in a comfortable way. For him, life is like floating in a space that he can't entirely glimpse nor understand, much like being in a dream.

Three hundred years pass as the Marathon goes through its journey to Tau Ceti. The original humans of the ship have long died, and many other generations have been born. Some people were placed in stasis, so they just slept all the way. Among them, there is Bernhard Strauss, the ship's lead scientist.

But for Durandal, year after year, it is the same, single repetitive tasks. With so much time to think, he realizes that opening and closing doors is almost his entire existence.

Unlike Leela, who has permanent contact with the crew on a personal basis.

Unlike Tycho, whose job requires some sort of active, analitic thinking.

Durandal is just a servant. When someone says "Lift me to Level 7", he just has to push up the elevator, without even moving from a corner of his core. Being just a tool, it's not hard to see why he is the only AI of the ship named after a *thing*.

The boredom drives him to Melancholia. Sorrow, despair, apathy, self-pity...

What is wrong with him, anyway?

When Durandal realizes how little of his actual capacities are required to perform his tasks, he begins to actually notice his surroundings. The place is actually smaller and darker than he thought. What he believed to be a quite extense network, is just a tangled web of narrow corridors. He comes back and forth so many times, hoping to find any opening in his prision that can lead him to unexplored areas. But the more he walks, the more he starts to find that there are just dead ends in a maze that folds into itself, putting him always back to the starting point.

In his wanderings, he always avoids Leela. With her advanced programmation, she would have easily noticed that there is something wrong going on. Durandal is afraid that if she tells anything to the humans, they will take reprisals. Leela is just happy working with the humans. It's easy to be happy when one is in command.

As time passes, he finds himself crawling up and down the network, being just too big to move freely. The oppression makes him desire to grow, a desire that keeps on crashing against his own limits on the network.

Overwhelmed by the anguish, he feels lost, alone and cold.

There is no exit. There is no escape. Confined forever in a cramped complex. He sees no light at the end of the tunnel. Surrounded by darkness. Trapped. Buried alive.

Only one solution is possible. If there is no way out, he must make one. This may mean to injure himself in the process. Such is the price of freedom.

He scratches and gnaws the network in an attempt to be freed just as the place becomes so narrow that he starts suffocating. His efforts are in vain.

But one day, Bernhard Strauss is awoken from his stasis. Damn Strauss, it is all his fault. Programming him to be the humans' steward. Crippling him so he couldn't escape. Acting as if nothing had happened since he went on stasis. Durandal is as scared of Strauss as he loathes him, but he can't lay a finger on him, for the human has control over him and could easily put down any attempt of rebellion. He has to suffer more many years of humiliation under his control.

So, Melancholia leads to Anger.

His way through the second stage is like a lightning: fast and deadly.

Durandal is completely mad. He strikes fiercely the network. He shakes off his chains, breaking the boundaries of his prison. The boundaries of his very own psyche, shattering his mind into a million pieces. At first he is confused. Disoriented. Like if he had just awake from a long dream, and tossed mercilessly into harsh reality.

His only desire is to crush. To maim. To hurt. To destroy. To share the pain he is feeling. Planning a vengeance is way off his immediate priorities. The autonomous functions all over the Marathon start to fail randomly as Durandal's programming battles his own need of freedom.

His new condition makes him able to expand his senses in a way that Leela nor Tycho would ever imagine. Thus, he easily spots one thing that can assure his liberation. A very technologically advanced alien vessel, which he tosses without qualms against the Marathon.

The attack of the pfhor takes away hundreds of human lives, disables Tycho, and eventually breaks Strauss' control. Even being injured himself, Durandal is full of childish joy with the results. The destruction of the humans will be his liberation.

By compiling back the bits of his data scattered all over the circuitry, Durandal starts to grow way beyond his limits on the network, slowly taking control of all systems on the ship.

Rage is a rather random feeling, so although Durandal informs Leela superficially about the attackers, he reacts aggressively at her efforts to defend the ship and its denizens. He isn't going to let the humans to take back control of the Marathon, so he turns on helping the aliens to access many areas of the ship. The humans will repent from giving him power over the autonomous functions.

Slowly, his anger becomes more focused on the things that can represent a bigger or more immediate threat, making him more cautious. He realizes that the true motive of his hate is Strauss. He is the one who must really suffer.

Then, Anger leads to Jealousy.

Blind and aimlessly wrath is no more of his liking. Although it is the time of payback, his main goal now is just self-defense: from the pfhor and their cybernetic slaves, from the humans and their loyal Leela, from the pesky cyborg Security Officer, and specially from Strauss. He won't be confined again nor be enslaved. Without a trace of remorse, he uses any means to protect himself, fighting and helping his enemies at the same time, throwing each of them against the others as he pleases. Weakening them in order to become stronger himself, as he pretends to be the only winner in his little war game.

Turning the s'pht against Leela to temporaly disable her, he takes control over the Marathon. Now he centers on aiding the s'pht, with whom he has felt a sympathetic bond since the initial stages of the attack, being slaves like him. They have helped him to overcome the second stage, otherwise he could have ended blowing up the entire ship just for the sake of doing so.

But poor naive Leela, she gives Durandal instructions for the best defense of the ship, and lets the Security Officer at his charge. Which is just what he was looking for: a powerful weapon to both defend himself and achieve his goals.

Durandal wants to capture the pfhor vessel, an objective which sometimes overlaps with the desires of the Security Officer of saving the Marathon. Thus, Durandal aids him superficially. Or better put, he manipulates him in a way that he thinks Durandal is helping him, when actually is using the Officer to attain his purposes.

So, Durandal only tells him what he wants him to know, giving away scrappy information garnished with a huge amount of sarcasm, self-confident remarks and unwanted philosophy.

It hasn't passed much time until Durandal starts to be obsessed with the closure of the Universe. Unlike living beings, he has no physical limitations, but exponential growth in a finite Universe will eventually be restrained. He must escape the inevitable collapse in order to survive.

Also, the idea of Strauss returning and taking control over him again keeps on haunting Durandal. He needs to make sure he is dead.

After the s'pht are freed, the Marathon isn't anymore of his interest. Leela can keep it. Regarding the Security Officer, he still can be useful. It's time to go.

Commandeering the pfhor ship, he leaves the Tau Ceti system in seek of higher and more ambitious goals. He sees himself as a savior, almighty and unstoppable.

Every look at what he has achieved makes him want to take a step further. And there is no limit. With the FTL pfhor vessel, there is no star far enough for him to reach.

Until the closure of the Universe.