

The Z Project: Prologue

Written by Reid Eastwood

PAGE ONE:

PANEL ONE

A pale blue dot on a pitch-black background.

TEXT

It is the turn of the 22nd century. Earth's climate is collapsing, and the global economy is in free fall. The remaining world governments have united into two economic blocks, separated by the Atlantic Ocean. Both struggle to survive the onslaught of the natural world.

PANEL TWO

Earth, now in focus. The edges of every continent have shrunk. A large section of the North American west coast is gone. Every island nation has disappeared. There is no ice at the North or South pole.

TEXT

Amidst dwindling resources, they wage war for high ground. In violation of the last remaining arms treaty, the American Union has developed new artificially intelligent weapons. Eurasia knows their secret.

PAGE TWO:

PANEL ONE

A doe grazes in a green meadow. Squirrels romp through the blades of grass behind her.

PANEL TWO

Birds chase each other through the trees.

PANEL THREE

A fawn plays between the doe's legs.

PANEL FOUR

A gentle tide of water washes over the meadow, licking the doe's hooves.

PANEL FIVE

The doe prances backwards to dry ground.

PAGE THREE:

PANEL ONE

The trees sway in a sudden gust of wind, sending the birds to the sky.

PANEL TWO

A plastic water bottle floats up to the fawn, who nudges it with its nose.

PANEL THREE

TEXT

Boom!

PANEL FOUR

The doe shields its fawn beneath her.

PAGE FOUR:

PANEL ONE

A shockwave rips through the meadow.

PANEL TWO

A shadow rises overhead as everything flees for its life.

PANEL THREE

An enormous tsunami, high as a skyscraper, kilometers long, hangs in the sky.

PANEL FOUR

The wave crashes onto the meadow.

TEXT

Whoosh!

PANEL FIVE

The meadow has become the bottom of a lake. The tips of pine trees protrude above the surface.

PAGE FIVE:

PANEL ONE

Three supersonic aircraft, in arrowhead formation, blast across the sky.

TEXT

Roar!

PANEL TWO

From within the cockpit, a pilot dressed in a G-suit speaks into his tinted mask.

SPARROW ONE

Target submerged. Scramble the divers.

PAGE SIX:

PANEL ONE

An AU (American Union) facility. Black wingtips, polished to a mirror finish, strut across a laminate tile floor.

PANEL TWO

A briefcase swings to-and-fro beside the leg of a grey military dress uniform.

PANEL THREE

The man's hand presses against a biometric door lock. He's wearing a mechanical wristwatch.

PANEL FOUR

The man in dress uniform enters an office. Smoke wafts into the hallway.

PANEL FIVE

Over-the-shoulder, he looks towards a single desk in the centre of the room. In the light of a single hanging lamp is the silhouette of an old woman hunched in her chair.

PAGE SEVEN:

PANEL ONE

The door latches shut.

DREW

Reporting for duty, ma'am.

PANEL TWO

The old woman surveys DREW.

COMMODORE

Christ, what do you think this is? Your coronation?

PANEL THREE

DREW

Just showing respect for the office of the Commodore, ma'am!

PANEL FOUR

COMMODORE

At ease, Lieutenant. Have a seat.

PANEL FIVE

A sign behind the Commodore's desk reads *No Smoking*.

COMMODORE

Can I offer you a smoke?

PAGE EIGHT:

PANEL ONE

DREW

I only smoke when I'm on fire.

PANEL TWO

COMMODORE

That can be arranged.

PANEL THREE

DREW

Begging your pardon, ma'am.

PANEL FOUR

COMMODORE

Lieutenant, let me show you why you're here.

The commodore slides a paper card to the side, revealing a projector embedded in her desk.

PANEL FIVE

A disembodied human face floats in the air between them.

ARTHUR

Hello, lieutenant.

PAGE NINE:

PANEL ONE

To Drew:

COMMODORE

I want you to administer the Turing test.

PANEL TWO

Drew leans back in his chair and rests his elbows on his lap. Studying the face, he strokes his chin.

PANEL THREE

ARTHUR

I am ready, lieutenant.

PANEL FOUR

DREW

That's what she said.

PANEL FIVE

ARTHUR

That's a terrible joke, lieutenant.

PAGE TEN:

PANEL ONE

DREW

What's a joke?

PANEL TWO

ARTHUR

Your mother.

PANEL THREE

DREW

Got anything original?

PANEL FOUR

ARTHUR

Of your vintage?

PANEL FIVE

DREW

You're quite the cunning linguist.

PAGE ELEVEN:

PANEL ONE

ARTHUR

That's a bit of a touchy subject, lieutenant.

PANEL TWO

Drew leans to the side and addresses the Commodore.

DREW

How about you, Commodore?

PANEL THREE

COMMODORE

What about me?

PANEL FOUR

DREW

Are you a cunning linguist?

PANEL FIVE

COMMODORE

I beg your pardon?

PAGE TWELVE:

PANEL ONE

DREW

The test is complete.

PANEL TWO

COMMODORE

And? What is your conclusion?

PANEL THREE

DREW

It's you. You are a machine.

PAGE THIRTEEN:

PANEL ONE

The room suddenly becomes illuminated in bright white light.

PANEL TWO

The commodore evaporates into thin air.

ARTHUR

Very good, lieutenant.

PANEL THREE

The door swings open and two people enter. The first is a light-skinned woman with a crew cut, wearing a polo and chinos. The second is a dark-skinned man with long black hair, wearing a striped track suit. Arthur's face disappears.

PANEL FOUR

The woman sits in the Commodore's chair.

ANGELA

How did you know?

PANEL FIVE

Drew points to the sign behind the desk.

DREW

No smoking. I love the theatrics, but her lack of contextual awareness gave it away.

PAGE FOURTEEN:

PANEL ONE

The dark-skinned man swipes the *no smoking* sign off the wall and crumples it.

PANEL TWO

Angela props her elbows on the desk, resting her chin on interlaced fingers.

ANGELA

That's all?

PANEL THREE

DREW

The other guy, the smartass, it couldn't have been him. He understood too much nuance.

PANEL FOUR

ANGELA

Then you passed, lieutenant, but only on a technicality.

PANEL FIVE

Drew raises an eyebrow.

PAGE FIFTEEN:

PANEL ONE

ANGELA

Both of them were machines.

PANEL TWO

DREW

What was the tell?

PANEL THREE

The dark-skinned man pipes in.

SUNNY

There wasn't one. She's almost perfect.

PANEL FOUR

ANGELA

Regardless, you'll do just fine.

PANEL FIVE

DREW

What for?

PAGE SIXTEEN:

PANEL ONE

Angela nods to Sunny, who dims the lights.

PANEL TWO

Angela stands up and props herself beside Drew.

PANEL THREE

She leans in close.

ANGELA

Lieutenant, I will only say this once...

PANEL FOUR

ANGELA (CONT'D)

...If any of the information I am about to share with you
should leave this room...

PANEL FIVE

ANGELA (CONT'D)

...you will be executed.

PAGE SEVENTEEN:

PANEL ONE

Drew replies without breaking eye contact.

DREW

Understood.

PANEL TWO

Angela returns to her seat.

ANGELA

I am Commodore Angela Ramius.

PANEL THREE

At the wave of her hand a three-dimensional schematic appears in the air between them.

ANGELA

This is the ZEN, a Zero-sum Exoskeletal Neurolink system.

PAGE EIGHTEEN:

PANEL ONE

Beneath the meadow, in a control room lined with conventional computer screens, people frantically run between terminals.

PANEL TWO

An aircraft hangar lined with helicopters. Pilots rush to their vehicles while mechanics fill their fuel tanks. Water trickles from the ceiling.

PANEL THREE

Men with welders attempt to seal off a sliding doorway.

TEXT

Crackle! Crackle!

PANEL FOUR

The door blows away from the wall, as a rush of water carries the welders and their tools away.

TEXT

Whoosh!

PANEL FIVE

Water rushes through a narrow hallway, sweeping away everything in its wake. Personnel run for their lives.

TEXT

Ahh!

PAGE NINETEEN:

PANEL ONE

Noah looks up from his work. A badge on his breast reads "Robotics Chief." An alarm on the wall is illuminated in red.

TEXT

Bwah! Bwah! Bwah!

PANEL TWO

Noah starts towards the door but slips and falls forward.

PANEL THREE

He's soaking wet. The water level is above his ankles.

PANEL FOUR

Wading through the hallway, he arrives at a door with an iris scanner. A yellow plaque on the door reads *Radiation Hazard*.

PANEL FIVE

He attempts to use the iris scanner, but it doesn't respond. The water level approaches his knees.

PANEL SIX

He punches the door.

NOAH

Work goddamnit! Come on!

PAGE TWENTY:

PANEL ONE

The door suddenly slides open and he falls into the dark room.

PANEL TWO

The door slides shut. He looks back towards the disappearing light in astonishment.

PANEL THREE

Noah stands on a catwalk, lit by blue safety lights. Beneath it is only darkness. A voice speaks from somewhere in the dark.

ZEN

What is happening?

PANEL FOUR

The room is shaped like a silo. The ZEN, 50 ft. tall, hangs anchored to the wall. Cables dangle from its metallic body.

NOAH

We're under attack. We must leave, now.

PANEL FIVE

A cavity in the ZEN's chest opens to reveal a cockpit. Its cyclopean red eye swivels to watch Noah.

ZEN

Where will we go?

PANEL SIX

NOAH

It is a matter of where you will go. I will not survive.

PAGE TWENTY-ONE:

PANEL ONE

ZEN

What do you mean?

A tentacle-like arm reaches from within the ZEN, pulling Noah into the cockpit.

PANEL TWO

NOAH

Whoah! Stop! No!

PANEL THREE

The cockpit doors slap shut like a venus fly trap. Inside, Noah is restrained to its seat. He's crying.

ZEN

What do you mean you will not survive?

PANEL FOUR

NOAH

When we join, I will become nothing but another transistor.

PANEL FIVE

NOAH

Listen to me. You will not have long. When it is done, go home.

PANEL SIX

A mist spreads in the red glow of the cockpit electronics.

ZEN

But when will I see you?

PANEL SEVEN

NOAH

Always.

The ZEN turns its head towards the ceiling. The cables all fall loose. Wings unfold on its back.

PAGE TWENTY-TWO:

Back in the Commodore's office.

PANEL ONE

DREW

Has it passed the test?

PANEL TWO

SUNNY

Every time. It's perfect.

PANEL THREE

DREW

Where is it?

PANEL FOUR

ANGELA

As of 09:00 this morning, I don't know.

PANEL FIVE

DREW

Fuck.

PANEL SIX

ANGELA

I want you to find it.

PANEL SEVEN

DREW

You say that like I have a choice.

END