A Bio 67

Chapter 67: Claws, masks and existential crisis.

The first thing that Alexa found upon re-entering the [Sewer System] was that it was dark and moist. She had vague recollections of this, but now that she was entering her more [Developed] stage, she was painfully aware of a very basic notion that she hadn't noticed before.

"This stinks…Main Core, ensure the nanite swarm keeps the bad odor away from our [Meal]." Alexa commanded inwardly and felt a pull into her metaphorical energy tank.

"[Mk1 Nanites have undertaken the mission, they have slaved several swarms of older generations. Saving data in the artificial make of isolated atmospheres.]"

Alexa felt a thin membrane weave around the interior of her plastic bag. It was almost paper thin and seemed to repair, flex, and expand as she moved around.

"Did you make an isolated, self-sufficient atmosphere…to keep our food safe?" Alexa asked as she started seeing a new data stream showing the composition of the self-sustaining space within her plastic bag.

"[Host did it, Main Core didn't participate in such… inane activity. First Generation Swarm followed host Wishes and acted as needed. Detected an expenditure in mana waves and is currently being replenished at a slow pace using both internal energy and refining mana waves from the atmosphere.]"

So…this wasn't a free energy? Interesting.

"[Host is adviced to save and keep the blueprint when this endevour is finished.]"

Yes, she would. This could be useful if she needed to do something else or walk into hostile environments. She wasn't quite sure if she would look good using a [Plastic Bag] as a head [Cover], but at the very least, she could shove it under her [Mask] later.

"So…can I use this?" Alexa said aloud while fiddling with her bracelet, a pull and some pushes at the bracelet and soon enough she had a full mask that could extend itself over her head to form a skintight head cover.

It was interesting to see the thing extend itself over her head and cover it entirely, hiding her face and hair.

[Notice Minion, you are outside your work hours. If you are about to engage in a freelance job, please note that Haephestus' Forge will not provide any additional help. If you are working for one of our Lieutenants, please provide their Name, and we shall look at why you weren't assigned in our rooster for that mission.]

"Main Core?" Alexa asked warily as she saw the notification fade away and a [Virtual keyboard] materialized as a projection in front of her.

"[It seems to be a pre recorded message, no data streams are detected between host and the Mask]." Main Core answered.

[No name was registered. If you are instead on a joy ride, please note that any damage taken will be discounted from your pay. If your suit or mask are damaged, you will only get new ones once you pay the damages.]

Quite interesting, how did they know she was doing? Did it have some degree of artificial intelligence like hers or Main Core?

"[Host is advised to remove mask and move without the use of this device until the blueprint is analyzed.]"

With a sigh, Alexa took her mask off and turned it back into a bracelet. She would have enjoyed the extra privacy and some of the functions of these [Mask], but alas, she needed to make sure that everything was in perfect order if she was to visit Sam again. She couldn't just show up with faulty technology!

What would he think?!?! That she was a dumb [CRAB] that couldn't even manage her own [Tech]?!?!?

"[Host is experiencing highly irregular burst of emotional and hormonal levels, data logged for later use… Also, host is able to create new mask with the use of local materials.]"

"Oh, right. We can make a new mask. We could do that." Alexa laughed shyly as she placed one of her hands against the nearest Wall near her. She felt tendrils bore into the Wall.

"[Material detected, vitrified clay, cement, iron, steel, copper, steel, plastic…….trace components of carbon, lead… Host is advised against using lead in the make of a new mask.]"

Alexa categorized the materials and started stockpiling the required ones into her [Material Storage].

–10 kgs of lead.

– 50 kgs of Steel.

–50 kgs of Copper.

–70 kgs of Iron.

– 100 kgs of Carbon.

– 200 kgs of Clay.

– 100 kgs of Plastic.

– 300 kgs of Cement.

Alexa didn't feel the need to take that much lead since the material seemed to be toxic by nature against her current [Organic Form], as for the other materials? She was surprised by how little there was of the normal metals and how much there was of the other materials.

Wouldn't it be better if they used more [Steel] or [Iron]? Why was there so little compared with the [Plastic] or [Cement]?

Either way, Alexa extended her tendrils far and wide collecting, she mostly took shavings leaving the structure alone, she fed her tendrils within the [Pipes] within the walls and grew them as they ate.

She felt her tendrils be destroyed in some spots but mostly ignored what didn't allow her to get near them and moved along. The haul seemed to be good, but the fact that she would only recover a fourth of what she put in meant that this was mostly a one-way use. At least the fact that she had taken this much meant that she could refill when needed… right?

She hoped at least.

"[Enough materials for current needs adquired, do you wish to continue?]"

Main Core asked her, it seemed that she had achieved some arbitrary goal set by [Main Core].

"No." Alexa answered aloud, she didn't need to of course, but it seemed to be the most natural way to answer, Alexa felt her fingers dig into the [Wall] and a [Mask] formed under her fingers, Alexa pulled her hand free and felt the tendrils that had grown too far rip as they separated from her hand, now all that remained there was the new bone white mask in her hands. "That will be enough for now, the tendrils will break themselves right?"

"[Affirmative, all the nanites currently working too far away from host will burst and any construction that is still tied to them will decompose into base materials an attosecond after.]"

That was good, she didn't need evidence of her pressence here if possible, or more like. She didn't want to leave evidence of her [Nanites] anywhere, she had gotten enough of a scare from that already.

Really, it was a discrimination against [Nanites], Alexa didn't understand this either. The [Nanites] weren't at fault of any [Fear] the [Humans] had, if anything, the [Humans] that had made those were at fault. Take Alexa's [Nanites] for example, as soon as she wasn't in contact with them they self destructed. The ones that seemed to have more freedom were her [MK1], and those seemed to be managed by her [Core].

So those were more of a weird exception since they weren't made by [Humans].

Her other [Nanites] though, those were a good example of how a [Nanite Swarm] wasn't a threat to humans. All because the one that made them had the brilliant idea of putting that limitation. While it annoyed Alexa, after investigating about the theorical [Gray Swarm] Alexa understood their fears.

If anything, Alexa was annoyed that she couldn't follow that example, taking over as a gray cloud without form. Yeah, Alexa wouldn't mind doing that if possible.

But that was that, and Alexa had more important things to worry about!

"Main Core? This doesn't have a strap. How am I supposed to use it?" Like looking at her new bone white mask that didn't seem to have a way to affix to her face.

"[Please put it on, Nanite swarm will use extra material set on the mask to encase host within a sealed helmet.]"

"How am I supposed to breathe?" Alexa asked as she put on the mask as instructed. Just like with the [Haephestus' Forge], she felt the embrace of the mask. Only instead of being slow, this mask seemed to move the materials straight through her skull and start forming all over her head.

She felt her [Hair] being pushed down against her [Skull]. Was this design using her [Hair] as a cushion? She knew that [Haephestus' Forge]'s [Mask] used some type of material to cushion. But [Main Core] was using her [Hair]?

This was a weird design choice.

"[Host's anatomy will be modified to increase the lung capacity, and a new set of air channels will be redirected throught the mask's hollow channels.]"

So she would be breathing using a set of hollow channels within the mask, and her lungs would have an increased lung size? This seemed… counterintuitive. She would probably need to take great amounts of oxygen and then use the drip feed of O2 that she could get using those small hollow channels.

"So I need to take the mask off, breath deep. Put it on, and move?" Alexa said aloud, yet again. "Fine, better than nothing I guess."

So Alexa put on her new mask, she felt her perception of the world narrow. And so, she saw…darkness.

"Main Core? This thing doesn't let me see." As soon as she said that, she felt a new data feed come into her [Consciousness Stream]. It was a camera feed from what seemed to be the outside world.

"[Eyeholes were deemed a liability, so a live camera feed will be provided, this also allows host to have a 360º viewpoint.]"

Alexa felt dizzy for a few seconds. This [Brain] wasn't as good with multiple viewpoints. She was ashamed. Before, when she was a [CRAB], she was used to having multiple viewpoints at the same time, but now? Now, she could barely manage two viewpoints, but a 360º viewpoint?

"Reduce the camera feed to only the front POV and manage the other extra viewpoints from your end," Alexa ordered. She felt her view of the world diminish, and her dizziness was gone. "Good, now we move onwards to Sam!"

Alexa smiled and moved forward; she was pretty happy with this. She had her [Mask], her [Meal], and everything was right in the world!

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"EVERYTHING IS WRONG!" Alexa screamed at the [Heavens] while shaking her hand against the ceiling.

She had been walking for almost two hours now. The only good thing so far was that her [Meal] was still warm and at the correct temperature. She had also developed a new [Arm], or perhaps...

"An [Armament].....pfft...." Alexa giggled at the bad pun.

"[Current effectivity of left arm-ament is optimal... Monofilament edges from artificial metallic claws outperform ceramic, clay and bone variants.

"...fine, we aren't calling this arm that." Alexa sighed as she felt her claws shift away from the [Clay], [Bone], [Cement] and [Ceramic] and turn the remaining ones into [Metal]. "Any chance that we have walked around here before?"

Alexa was mostly talking to herself at this point, or that would look for anyone else.

"[Sewer system mapping continuing, current location seem to be 500 meters away of target location.]"

"REALLY?!?!?" Alexa took off her mask so as to scream better (And also refill her lungs). "How do you know? Did you find evidence? Some of the [Spider Tread]?"

"[Found a map in Wall to the left of host. Map matches data with current mapped data.]"

"....ah." Alexa said as she turned to look to the Wall to her left, and sure enough, there was indeed a [Map] there. Alexa could see the entry point she had used and the exit point she had been pointed to the last time she was there.

She could even see some parts of the [Route] that Sam had given her…And the starting point she had taken from her encounter with him. She also noticed that some of those areas were marked with [Red] on this [Map].

"[Do you wish to proceed further with the mapping of a route?]" Main Core asked her, and even gave her a projection of a Y/N for her.

"Of course that will be a yes." Alexa sighed, and a virtual map appeared in front of her eyes. "Let's go find my date then."

And in that tune, Alexa put on her [Mask] again and brandished her self-cleaning metallic claws. Her arm had shifted dramatically in the two hours she had been walking in circles around this place. From a normal [Human] arm into what now looked closer to a chitin-covered arm with five metallic claws.

She had needed to set an automatic correction to her movements to make sure she wasn't cutting herself with this arm. It wasn't a loss in biomass since the [Meat] that was ripped would be fed into her system. But she still needed to burn energy to stitch her [Body] back and move the [Biomass] where it was needed.

It was easier to set an automatic correction so her claws didn't hurt her.

"Do you think he will like the food?" Alexa asked [Main Core].

"[...inconclusive query. Food is to be used to replenish nutrients and store energy. There is no reason to not enjoy Food.]"

"Right, I know that. Like I would like free food too!" Alexa answered annoyed, "But I would like a [Mango Cake] more than a [Rat], for example!"

And that was the whole Crux of the matter. She really enjoyed [Flavored Food], she knew, of course. At the end of the day, what mattered the most was whether she was getting [Biomass] and [Energy].

It mattered not if her [Biomass] had good or bad taste. The end was all that mattered. [Survival] was all that she cared about.

So long she [Survived], she could continue [Eating] she could continue [Growing]. She could continue [Evolving].

But...that was Alexa, that was how Alexandra Saintsworths lived. That was how she, [Test Subject P4] was designed. She knew that the [Humans] were different; she hadn't known that before, but as soon as she started using a [Brain] to host her [Consciousness Stream], she became aware that there was so much more nuance to it.

Could she [Eat] anything? Of course she could. She could probably start eating [Dirt] this second, and she would manage to survive just as well as if she had continued eating [Biomass]. Most of her [Designs] would need to be altered, and she may need to change her strategies, but it was doable.

Did she want to do that? No. She did not want to eat [Dirt]. Why? It was wrong, she didn't like the taste, and she didn't like the implications of how much she would need to change.

But what if this conundrum were presented to her purely [Nonhuman] side? Would [Test Subject P4] answer negatively?

"[Chances of Subject P4 answering this with a negative hinge on the test parameters. So long eating Dirt increases chances of survivability more than eating Biomass then Subject P4 will do it.]"

Exactly.

"And we can't put our circumstances on Sam. He is…" Alexa said as she was walking slowly to the place she had seen him before. "…Human."

And Alexa was not.

She may wield a [Human] as her [Host] right now, but at the end of the day. Was she truly [Human]?

Looking at her arm, the answer would be a [No].

She hadn't seenm any [Humans] do what she did, granted she hadn't seen many [Humans], and the ones she had seen seemed to think that it was [Human] behaviour what she did.

"[Host seems to be under great amounts of self-introspection. Thread of thought approved as it seems to increase overall chances to reduce risks to long-term survival.]"

"Shut it Main Core." Alexa grumbled, she didn't like this either, she hadn't stayed that long in any given [Stage] before. Was it that why she was like this?

Was that the reason she liked to stay on her [Child Stage] form for longer periods of time? Was that some sort of self-preservation mechanism? Did…did she somehow know this could happen?

"Ughh….how long before-" Alexa grumbled as she sank her [Claws] into a wall to leave a mark, only for her arm to be stopped by the presence of a white thread. "...Hello, handsome~"

She had found some of Sam's white threads, that meant that she was close.

"Main Core, start monitoring the area, point any increase of threads and possible routes to find Sam. We can't let his food get cold." Alexa smiled as she took off her mask and used it as a pseudo cap. She would put it on as soon as she found some hostile presence, more to protect her identity than her [Face].

No one in her sane mind would let an attack land on her beautiful face after all.