

A BIO-WEAPON'S RHAPSODY

Chapter 26: We finally got answers!

The room they walked in was...interesting, unlike any other room or den Alexa had seen, this one seemed different in design, she didn't understand why it had so many [Chairs], each one with an included square-shaped platform that didn't seem sturdy enough to stand in.

"A Classroom? First a Super Heroe now a Classroom? Are you sure this is a Villain organization?" The big [Human] that worked as her personal shield spoke.

So this room was a [Classroom]?

What was that?

"It's the room we use for capacitations, so yes. We have Classrooms. As for SuperForce..." Gabriel spoke while playing with his mask, making sure it was in place. "That was more of a favor, usually we would have done the whole act of him attacking me and me fighting back, he may win or lose but it would have been on the news..."

So that was a play?

“Don’t get me wrong, we would fight for real. But in this case...He came straight to us for help, we make exceptions in our fights, that is why most Heroes turn a blind eye to us, because they know we will help when needed.” Then Gabriel stuck the drawing of her [Child Stage] form into the wall, “A lost kid, or in this case, a probable kidnapping is one such case, if any of you know has taken her hostage, release her. Or give her to us and we will not hurt you. So this is as good as a moment as any for you to know our rules.”

“Rules? Aren’t we Villains? Rules are for the weak!” One of those who had only the upper half of the mask spoke, his face was closer to a snout than a [Human Mouth].

“That is true, well spoken!” Gabriel smiled as he clapped, “But you are missing a very important point.”

He then started walking toward the human that had spoken, each step measured, and yet... Alexa couldn’t help but move a little to try and get her seat to stand behind her shield.

“You are weak.” Gabriel said as if he was stating the most obvious thing, “And we are strong, so we make the rules. And if you don’t want to follow them, you aren’t welcome here.”

Then pointing to the door they had walked in a few seconds ago, he added “Either Leave, or start listening to what your betters tell you.” And then turning to everyone else Gabriel made sure they nodded at his words, so when Gabriel turned to her, she also nodded (Perhaps faster than needed too). “Okay, let’s check, why do you think we need to draw this line in our activities kiddo.”

She was [Kiddo] now? What was the thing with these humans giving her names that weren’t hers!?!?

“Because you want to limit the amount of conflicts to a bare minimum, keeping the [Heroes]happy would allow you to have a greater amount of freedom to act. And if all you need is to let a few [Prey] alone to get other more powerful [Predators] away, then the cost-benefit is balanced enough.” Alexa answered, “Also I’m not Kiddo, I have a name.”

And after, she totally didn’t pout while adding the last part.

“...not the answer I wanted, but a very logical conclusion, so your Core is closer to a Tinkerer huh, wouldn’t suspect that.” Gabriel said with a shrug, “As for the name, unless you come out and give us one to use, we will keep using what we have.”

She wanted one too! But...she would need to think about what to use for her name, she had already failed when giving her name the first time, and while she liked the name, Alexa, it was a problem the fact that it hadn’t been the name she had intended to give.

It was good they fixed it, since she had found that this name was female and the one she had intended to give was for males.

“Now I have been playing around answering the question about Cores, so may as well keep the bit going, Rules!” Gabriel said turning back and walking towards the wall where he had stuck her drawing. “First, don’t attack civilians unless that is part of the mission given to you.”

That seemed easy enough, she now just needed to find what those [Civilians] were!

“Second, your work will be that of a Minion, our organization [*Heaphestus’s Forge*]

specializes in training Minions, and our boss rents those Minions to other villains. That will be you.” Gabriel pointed at them, sticking more images to the wall, this time of masks the white and black masks, and some variations with half masks too. “A black mask is for non-core powered Minions, the Heroes know that if they see a black mask then they need to put on the Civilian Gloves, if one of you ever dons a black mask you can’t use your Core Powers.”

“Wouldn’t that be a good way to ambush them?” The same human as before spoke, making Gabriel give a long sigh.

“Yes, that would be a great ambush indeed. But then the next Hero would come with all the fury of a god into the next black-masked Minion. “ Gabriel said, snout man didn’t seem to find a problem with that, “Now that will not be a problem to you, even if all your powers amount is having the brain of a dog. But we do love

having living Minions to work with, and if the Heroes are using all their kit no one will want to do that work. So that means we will need to make an example of the IDIOT who decided to use a black mask to ambush some random weak-ass Hero.”

Oh, yeah, she could see how that was a problem, it was a problem of allocating their resources smartly, they needed to make sure the weak links in the chain were safe by making sure the strong chains were visible.

“So we use White Masks to make sure that the [Hero] pays attention to us instead of the [Prey] within our side, so that [Predator] fights against [Predator]?” Alexa asked.

“...We will work in your words later, but yes that is about it. You all use white masks to make sure you are visible targets, but your work isn’t to fight. But to distract the sidekicks while the Villain does their thing.” Gabriel said turning to the white masks. “Your work is to do whatever the Villain asks, if they ask you to dance on top of a moving car, you do it so long you can guarantee your safety, if they ask you to attack civilians...well, we will not fail you if you decide against doing that. But if you do decide to do it, more jobs where that will be needed of you will be assigned,”

...She would look into getting those jobs. If it meant an easy way to get biomass then that was her type of job. Oh right! Food!

“My skills require me to get an increased amount of biomass to work with, how will that be accounted?” Asked Alexa while raising her hand, she wasn’t quite sure why she raised her hand, but both her meat shield and Gabriel smiled and shook their head as if it was something funny.

“How bad is the conversion? Also, do you need a specific type of food? You refer to it as biomass but I assume any kind of food works?” Gabriel asked, way more information than she expected. Well, at least this meant that it wouldn’t be nutrient slurry.

“If it’s for immediate use the conversion ratio is 1:1 if I need to stockpile it...” Alexa didn’t want to increase her body mass....”The conversion is 2:1, per each two kilograms of biomass I can only save 1 for later use.”

“Does it matter the type?” Gabriel asked once more.

“ I don’t think so? If I want to use muscles of a certain type it would help to have that type as food, but I can turn any type of biomass into what I need, the limit is only the amount of change I make and how much energy that consumes.” Alexa answered, she wasn’t quite sure if there was a hard limit to her nanites, but since they worked by realigning the material there shouldn’t be, unless the material was some that refused her changes...

“And this energy I guess it will be sugar...So if your forms are other animals or forms we need meat, and to fuel the changes we need sugar...Ugh....This will be annoying, but if the change is good...” Gabriel mumbled, “We will check with you later when we plan your uniform, we don’t need all your skills to their full extent, it will help us plan better, but how much you want to show is up to you. The more you show us the better we can prepare for you, but that is up to you.”

Gabriel said, she was about to say that she wouldn't mind saying more, but her meat shield shook his head at her.

"I only need construction materials, my Core integrates them and turns my form into them, the change is permanent the only change I can make is changing the type of material, but I can't return to a human form." Her Meat shield said, "So just get me good base materials and I can tank pretty much anything."

That was one interesting tidbit, what could come of his blueprint? Alexa wanted to know.

"That is easier, we will get some material set for later and check, but if we can alloy it...Yeah, prepare to test with metals, we will probably settle with Durasteel for now, we will check how your body deals with alloys and more exotic materials later." Gabriel seemed happier with her meat shield than with her. Rude.

"Anyone else with exotic needs?" Gabriel turned to the others, but no one seemed to want to answer.

"I only need a place to stay," The other Human Girl said, the one that fell after their time running. "My power only requires wind around, the energy seems to stockpile on its own and refills with some rest, so I don't need anything fancy."

"A normal metaphysical one, we will teach you some methods to deal with this energy," Gabriel answered, she had noticed the spikes on the weird energy that seemed to be a catalyst for her [Core] formation.

“Can I attend those classes too? My power lets me detect that thing too.” Alexa said, making almost everyone turn to look at her. “What?”

“Well, we all have felt it at least once, when the [Core] was forming. But you say you can detect it? “ Gabriel said turning to her, “Can you detect it now? What number?”

Gabriel raised one of his fingers and then formed a number with the weird energy, she could only see it because her eyes had been modified to detect it with a transparent lens in there to see it. “Seven.” Alexa answered, “So can I attend?”

“...Yes, yes you can,” Gabriel said while pulling a phone from his clothes and reading something on it. “So Eleanore gave you the address...and your contact was Frank of all people....that is interesting...”

“[Frank The Bettle] helped me when [SuperForce] was fighting [Scorcher], he told me that I could get housing and food here.” Alexa nodded at those words and added her opinion, “So I will require at least food.”

“...yes we do pay quite well, you should be able to pay for your food after the rent...Actually, Eleanore deals with these things, just go to her and show her your mask, she will deal with the paperwork” Gabriel said turning to the rest.

Most of the people there said that they didn't need much, the ones with beast-like parts just needed a place to stay and more allowance for food, Gabriel passed them some tubes with a plastic exterior.

The human with the snout opened his and grimaced, Alexa also grimaced since her nose was testing a more sensible configuration and she was able to pick on the smell, nutrient paste.

"It doesn't taste as bad as it smells, and it gives you the extra boost you need," Gabriel said, he was lying. Or he never tasted it.

Snout's face however emptied the contents of that in one go and ate it, then closed his eyes and took a breath, afterward he seemed more at peace, was he that hungry? With that design for a mouth and his other modifications, Alexa didn't see a reason why he would be hungry.

"Now with that out of the way...I guess there is nothing more so..." Gabriel turned with a more serious face to them, "About the reason why we lie to those that aren't Core users...and even to those that are."

This made everyone settle down.

"The Core Powers we have....what do you think they are?" He asked them, Alexa...wasn't quite sure what they were.

“They are manifestations of the powers we absorb from those around us. I lived near Beast Core Users so I turned into one of them, had I known I would get them I would have moved near the center to get a more human form.” Snout's face said, “Not that I mind these powers or the feeling of being part of a Pack.”

That was his answer, Alexa...wasn't quite sure about that.

“They are the powers granted to us by a higher entity. I needed a stronger body in a time of need, so I was granted this undying body.” Her meat shield answered, “I miss the feeling of touch and taste, but I am grateful for this gift.”

The answer seemed to oscillate in those two opinions, either the powers granted to them by association or powers granted by a higher life form. And neither seemed to be the right answer to Alexa.

“And you little girl who is definitely not a Kiddo?” Gabriel turned to her.

She hadn't been called Kiddo, and yet she felt offended, weird.

“I'm not sure. I was told that association would alter the type of [Core] I would get, but after awakening my [Core] I didn't feel such a thing. Then I was told my [Core] was already formed... Now I find that some kind of entity is granting these powers?” Alexa said turning to her meat shield, she...was inclined to trust him, if

only because he seemed to want to protect her. “So I’m not sure. What I know is that these skills...helped me greatly. So I want to study and learn what I can.”

“The Core Powers we have....aren’t affected by those around us, we aren’t quite sure what is the catalyst for the formation of a Core. What we know is that...” Gabriel said while turning to the weird wall where he had stuck all the pictures before and written on it, his words weren’t neat like most of the letters she had seen, if anything they seemed to not follow any form and even the same letters looked slightly different, she was still able to read them though, “...The Core Power we get answers to something primal.”

And the word he wrote? It was [Wish].

“They answer to our wish, to our prayer in time of need, to what we desire the most. You formed your Core while in danger? Chances are you will get a Core Power to get you through it,” Gabriel then turned to snout face, “You are surrounded by people with beast-like powers? If you envy their power, their forms, their freedom...chances are you will get a similar form.”

“What about me then? I didn’t get a Core Power that granted me a sturdy body nor did I get a power that changed my form.” The wind human girl asked, “I got the power to be a fan.”

“That is the next part, our Core Power comes in two forms, Physical alterations, and metaphysical alterations.” Gabriel said, then added two new images to the wall, “Physical alterations are like Golem or Wolfman here, they ended with a body that was changed to give them their power.”

“So since I wanted to survive...No, since I wanted a sturdy body. I got one that would take in the materials around and change to accommodate my needs....” Her meat shield said.

“...And since my only contact with Core Users was with Beast Core Users...I ended as one?” Snout face said while cackling. “And why don’t you tell us this before?!?!? Why hide it ?!?!?”

“And what? What do you think will happen when someone Wishes for infinite power? Do you think it will be granted?” Gabriel smirked at snout face.

“What is the problem with wanting power?!?” Snout's face snarled back, “That is our right!”

“Yes, it is. Tell me...how much meat did you need to eat when your power manifested?” Gabriel asked in an even tone.

“...100 kilos.” Snout's face said, that was...weird, he didn’t seem to have that much mass though.

“And where did you get that much meat?” Gabriel said, what was he getting at?

“...The neighbor had a few Great Danes Dog.” Snout's face mumbled.

“That is one lucky thing for you, if not you may have turned cannibal...Well, you ended up being so anyway since it seems your traits are of that species....” Gabriel smirked at snout face.

“So? Your point?” Snout's face grumbled.

“How much meat do you think *Infinite power* would take?” Gabriel asked.

That simple question made everyone very quiet, and snout face eyes dilated as if understanding crossed his mind.

“Probably more than 100 kilos.” So since no one said anything, Alexa said it for them.

“Very true, I would say at least more than ten times that.” Gabriel smirked at her, “Do any of you know about the meat wasteland?”

The what now?

“It is a desert where an unknown animal developed a core. The place is anathema to life and any organism that walks there is attacked by the very soil that has turned into an amalgamation of meat, bones, and dirt.” Snout's face answered. “What of it?”

“Well, for one, we know exactly the species of the Core user,” Gabriel said unamused.

“...It was human?” Her meat shield asked. “That is impossible, that place is almost as big as Rhode Island!”

“It was human at some point, there is no brain activity in that place, we don't know what the original owner of that core wanted, but his Core tried to create it, and since he didn't have enough biomass...Well, it mutated into a way to get it. That is how it started, and now we are salting the earth near it and keeping it at bay while we wait for it to starve.” Gabriel then turned to snout face, “That is why we no longer advertise the true origin of the Core Powers we have. Because we don't want another event where a smart ass asks for infinity power and their core is a physical one.”

“Then what about Metaphysical ones? What would it make that type of wish?” Wind girl asked.

“Well, do you know about the mirage city?” Gabriel asked, the girl seemed to get the reference....and didn't elaborate.

“Metaphysical ones tend to try their best, Mirage City was made when the current President wanted a place where no one would bother him, his power got out of control and turned the city he was into a place that no one could access unless he wanted. And it tied him there, so now he is the only one that can grant access, but since you need to go in to ask for permission...Yeah, he is stuck alone there.” Gabriel didn’t seem that bothered in this example, “Usually they are less prone to causing problems for others, but metaphysical ones cause problems for you. So if I had to advise you, if you have a physical one, be grateful, because the metaphysical one would screw you harder than the physical one.”

“Then what is mine?” Alexa asked, “I can change my body, but I didn’t need to eat biomass when I got it.”

“Hard to tell, your Core Power seems to be closer to a flesh shaper, or maybe a shape shifter. We will check later.” And in that tune, Gabriel took the images from the wall, “Now with this information try to check what you were thinking when you got your Cores, and try to work that into your understanding. What we call Beast Cores, Insect Cores, or Whatever Cores are suggestions with no limits. That is why there are Insect Core users with Core Powers that shouldn’t work with the type of insect they seem to have!”

So that was why [Frank The Bettle] could use that weird power to turn totally invisible? So her own Core may give her more power than what she had? But when she got it...she didn’t really desire or have a wish for anything, did she? What had been her [Wish] then?

Chapter 27: We did it!

And that was how that went, Alexa learned many things, and she got to meet [Humans] who had all kinds of weird powers...She didn't manage to get blueprints from them since they all seemed to be checking each other at all times.

"Okay, class, as for the next part...Let's go this way." And suddenly Gabriel clapped to get everyone's attention and pointed to a door that led them into a hallway. "Move along, we are almost done."

This one they walked for around ten minutes, it was empty and besides their footstep, no other sound was detected, and there were heavy footsteps to be had, since her meatshield size and weight meant that he caused too many sounds and rumbles when he moved.

"Take care little one, I can't move well in closed spaces." Said her meat shield turning to her.

"It's okay." Alexa answered, "I'm fast enough and I keep a safe distance."

She also wanted him near so she could take cover should [Gun] type emplacement weapons spring from within the walls, these had the same style and color as those in her [Den], so she was leery about them.

"We are almost done, when you get through this next part we can get you the correct credentials and you can use the normal hallways," Gabriel said from the front, he had walked ahead and was now standing near a door. "Sorry about this part, but white masks need to use this one before being accepted. Black Masks are

weaker so we can deal with them, but most of the time White Masks are more...dangerous.”

...So there were [Gun] type emplacements after all.

“And only two got the meaning of this? Well, that is fine too.” Gabriel shrugged opening the door, “In we go, your next part of this will be with my partner Cerberus. Don’t mind her too much.”

The what now?

“What about you?” Alexa asked, she didn’t want to deal with new Core Power Users, she hadn’t plotted a way to deal with this one! And now she was meeting another one?

“You will see me around, of this batch you are probably the only one guaranteed credentials, and only because of your situation.” Gabriel smiled at her, “You will still need to take the test, but I was told that you fulfilled most of our needs, so this is mostly for show.”

“The brat is in already? So what? She is the daughter of a Villian? Hah!” Snout's face barked, “So even Super Villain organizations fall to nepotism.”

No one else answered at that, or at least they waited till snout face ended his barking laugh. Gabriel did wait at least.

“You can ask that to Cerberus too, and you will understand why she is the one that we will accept even if we need to fail everyone else for it. I am not sure about if I believe it either, but the big boss trusts Cerberus. And that is the one vouching for her.” Gabriel shrugged and started walking in the other direction.

“I WILL!” Snout's face said and he walked in, one by one the rest did so.

Alexa waited since her meat shield was waiting, the other [Human] that seemed to manipulate wind also waited, but she got the impression that she waited because the other [Humans] had piled into the [Door].

“I don’t mind if you got in because of influences, god knows I would have done the same.” Her Meatshield said, “But if you are doing it for fun, please at least reconsider it, this is a dangerous life. And your family will be sad if something happens to you, even if they too, like you want to be, are Villains.”

“Does your Mother even know that you are here?” The other [Human] asked, “I thought you were around my age and had a smaller build, but...you aren’t are you?”

So this one was [Of age]? Did those bulges only grow in people around that [Of age] thing?

“I don’t have a [Family] or [Mother], nor a [Home]. That is why I want to get this job.” Alexa answered the questions, “As for [Age]...I think this [Form] is twelve years, but I was told it would be the bare minimum age.”

And on that note, she walked in, no other [Human] was waiting to enter, and as far as she could tell, these two wanted to keep her [Safe], so they wouldn’t attack her, she still kept her guard up of course. It wouldn’t do to be sneak attacked.

This new [Room] she walked into was different once more, it had open spaces on each of the four sides and in the middle had a...interesting construction.

Four pillars with vine-like objects joining the four pillars making an area in the middle, this area seemed to have a different type of [Floor], if she was seeing it right, this one seemed to be softer since the [Human] standing on it sank a few millimeters on it.

“*[So these are the last ones.]*” The [Human] spoke, it seemed to be a [Female] variant, but her voice was distorted by her mask, it was...different from the ones she had seen so far.

This one had three [Faces] and each of them was designed to look like one of the [Hound] type bioweapons she had fought before, it looked as if someone had taken a similar approach to snout face and used that to model that mask.

It was weird because the mask was black, but it had some decorations in black, the [Hound] parts of the mask were black, but the rest of the mask was white. And the voice of the [Human] came from the three faces on the mask.

Weird.

“[My name is Cerberus, you may think of me as...Human Resources and Training. I will need to know as much of what you think about yourself or as much as you want to share with us.]” Cerberus spoke, then pointing at snout face she added, *“[Starting with you WolfMan.]”*

“I’m a Beast Core, Wolf type. I can grow stronger the more fresh meat I eat, no hard limits found yet. If I hunt it then my power is stronger.” Snout's face started, “Also I despise nepotism.”

And added the last part looking at Alexa, she wasn’t quite sure why, but she felt that he was being rude.

“[Now for this part...I have a Core Power that lets me measure the truth of statements. I don’t like to use it so this is one of the few occasions that you will have it used against you, unless you do something stupid that is].” Cerberus started saying, hadn’t she just met someone like that? Someone that had a Core Power like this...

Was Cerberus Eleanore!?!?!?

“[So with that out of the way, answer me this WolfMan.]” Cerberus said pointing at Snout's face, the eyes of the face in the middle of Cerberu’s Mask shone in red light, “[Will you use any information you find while working with Haephestu’s Forge against a fellow member of this organization?]”

Snout's face turned silent and after thinking for a few seconds he answered, “No. So long they are fair to me. I will stay loyal,” was his answer.

Cerberus nodded at that, then said *“[Of those around you, how many are you 100% sure you could defeat.]”*

What was the meaning of that question?

“...None.” Snout's face answered, “At least not of the White Masks, fights against Core Users are hard to predict, if I knew what they can do and how, then I might be able to win against some. But my pack alpha always said, only an idiot says he can hunt 100% of the prey they chase.”

...That was stupid, if you can’t hunt it, then it wasn’t prey but predator.

Snout's face was stupid, as was this [Alpha] he spoke about.

“[Okay, next...]” And like that Cerberus repeated with everyone else. Most answered like Snout Face.

“I will stay loyal to those that help me.” Her meatshield answered, and then when the question about if they could defeat anyone else...” Only Wolf Man, and maybe the fan girl.”

Wolf Man only grumbled about ‘Stupid rocks not working for his Core Power’. Or something, and Cerberus laughed at these interactions, so maybe it was okay for her to answer what she had thought?

The Fan Girl's answer was more or less the same, only answering “I don’t think I could defeat anyone...” while eyeing her, and then doubling down on her answer. Had she discovered her true might?

“[I will let the lie slip since it is actually true,]” Cerberus said, making the fan girl tilt her head.

“But I didn’t...wait that was true?” Was the confused answer of Fan Girl.

And so, it was finally her turn arrived!

“[And now you....First question, only because we do need to have witness, even though we already know the answers.]”

So she was indeed Eleanor? *“[Will you stay loyal to Haephestus Forge, and do you promise to not use what you learn here to cause damage to your coworkers?]”*

No wait, wasn't this question different? *“[To clarify, a coworker is someone who will share the same mission with you, and be there to help you. They are allies who will fight at your side.]”* Cerberus clarified before she asked what the meaning was!

So it was indeed Eleanore!

“Yes, so long they aren't hostile [Predators] I will not attack those that are deemed allies to the [Mission] assigned to me.” So Alexa answered as such in a happy tone, more allies were welcomed! She hadn't had too many missions with allied units in her tests. Mostly because even those tests that had other non-hostile targets always ended in those targets attacking her too.

“[Truth...okay, and this is just to clarify some doubts we had...But...of those in this batch...How many could you defeat?]” Cerberus asked, again, the wording seemed different? *“[To clarify, we count them as defeated so long they aren't able to continue fighting back.]”*

“Hmm....” Alexa stopped to think for a second.

“As if the midget could defeat even one of us.” Snout's face smirked, “Besides the stupid Golem who may surrender on its own, why are we making this mockery? Just be done with it, nepotism, no matter how you try to frame it.”

Rude! She was thinking.

“All of them.” Alexa answered in the end, “I may have some trouble with Mister Golem since his biology may be different, but for the rest, I should be able to deal with them all.”

Silence.

Snout's face seemed to be about to say something when Cerberus spoke, “[*Truth...Okay, how are you thinking about defeat?*]” Cerberus then asked as such, this time the three masks she had the eyes shining in red. “[*Is it because they surrender? Because they can't fight anymore? Or because you use your Powers to deal with them?*]”

That was a silly question.

“Of course, it's by ceasing of functions. That is why Mister Golem may be a problematic one.” Alexa then turned to Snout's face, “Him for example, even though he has some [Parts] of a [Hound Type] sample, most of his form seems

close to the human [Blueprint], so if we take into consideration that, most of the vital organs are around the same spots. I should be able to [Pierce] them easily enough in close combat before this form takes too much damage. Then using his biomass as fuel to move and repair I can move to the next target.”

Snout's face stopped grumbling and then just stared at her, “I would probably go for another of the [Beast] type since they seem to be the dangerous one. Either one of the [Wing] type or [Stealth] type.” Alexa pointed to those that had wings or those that shared the same design with the other quadripedal designs that had a higher focus on agility.

Cats had the book called them?

Yeah, those. “Then I would move to those with weird Core Powers, like the guy who could raise objects.” Alexa pointed to another white mask that had used the same type of powers that [SuperForce], only in a lower degree of strength and mastery.

“And me?” Fan girl asked.

“For last, your power doesn’t seem to grant you too much degree of danger. Besides if I left you for last you could surrender before I got to you....if you are fast enough.” Alexa answered, she wasn’t sure why would she allow her to surrender, but it [Felt] right.

“Oh...thank you.” Fan girl answered.

“Then for last Mister Golem.” Alexa then turned to her meat shield. “I would probably need to burn most of the gains from the other [Humans], but I should be able to produce enough muscle mass to pierce the [Stone].”

“[And that is why she gets a pass into our organization,]” Cerberus said, turning to everyone else. “[From this batch, she is the most dangerous of your group, not because of her powers. But because of her mastery and application of it.]”

Snout's face was still moving his mouth opening and closing it, “If she had any other power, she could probably qualify for Villain...But because of her age, we will accept her as a Minion.”

“SHE WOULDN'T DEFEAT ME!” Snout's face screamed, turning to her. “She is what? ten? As if a ten-year-old girl could defeat me!”

...That was weird, she got the feeling that Snout's face was acting like the [Hound] type acted when they noticed victory was impossible, They turned more vocal and looked as if they would attack when in reality they were searching for a way to escape.

“Control yourself, Cerberus only detects what we think is the truth.” Her Meatshield said while standing in front of her, truly, the best one of this batch!

“Right...that is how these power works, I forgot. Right...as if a brat knew what they spoke about. Got scared for a second.” Snout's face said while returning to a more relaxed stance, one where he was able to volt away from her at a moment's notice.

“Oh right, what is nepotism?” Alexa asked, might as well get that one over.

“[Here, take this,]” Cerberus said while throwing at her a small square-shaped object, Alexa caught it and her nanites analyzed it as soon as it touched her skin.

“[Detected similitarities with storage unit within Cellphone, decrypting....Found database with definitions and information about language and customs.]”

It was a database!

“[You can plug that into any of the computers within the base, it has a few books and a dictionary, also some information about the organization. Everyone else will get the smaller version, but you get also the school one.]” Cerberus said while pointing with her finger to a table that had been raised from the ground with a line of the same objects.

Weird, they all didn't seem that fazed by the wondrous object that they had been given. Alexa was happy since she had found a database that seemed to have definitions and information, but maybe they already had a version of this?

“Thank you!” Either way, she followed what she had been taught and thanked Eleanore.

“[Also start thinking about a name, you will need one for work since we can’t use your names. Even if your identity is easy to uncover you still need to have a pseudonym to go by, it makes easier in the long run.]” Cerberus added.

A name huh...

Good thing she had just gotten a database full of possible definitions!

Main Core!

“[Searching database for appropriate fake name....List of suggestions is as follow...]”

And so Main Core gave her a list with weird names, some of those were very ugly. She wasn’t even aware a name could be ugly!

“I will go by [Rhapsody]!” In the end, Alexa cut that short and picked one of her own choosing.

“...Why?” Cerberus asked in a tired tone.

Most of the other [Humans] seemed to look at her weirdly, which was weird because she couldn't even see their faces!

“Because I like it, and my power matches that description. To flow freely and change in tune and form!” Alexa declared as such.

Her power or what she thought could pass as her Core Power was the power to change her form and alter her form, and if the definition that she found of Rhapsody was to be trusted, a Rhapsody didn't have a strict or defined form. Always changing, moving around freely without a defined structure.

“...Yeah, I guess that is a good description, well. Welcome to Haephastus's Forge, hope you enjoy your stay **Rhapsody**.” Cerberus said offering her hand, so Alexa matched the gesture and grabbed said hand.

Behind her, her meat shield placed one of his heavy and big hands on her shoulder and gave it a soft squish, she...may have reinforced that shoulder to make sure nothing broke... But only a little!

This meant that her first hurdle had been passed successfully. She had joined this [Organization] and was going to be provided with what she needed, and maybe more!

She wasn't sure what it could get her, but [Frank the bettle] seemed to believe it would be for the best, so she would see what came from this. Now...what does a [SuperVillain] organization that fosters [Minions] do?

And when do they start bringing out the [Food]?

Chapter 28: The Fairy Team

After that had been done, most of those around had...for some reason. Kept a distance, not her meat shield or the weird windy girl. Really, these [Humans] were weird, they all spoke about fighting and defeating other [Humans], but she even mentioned how she would go about doing that to them they started to keep a distance?

Rude!

“Well, we usually move the team-making to a later date. But may as well start it now, we will start assigning them now.” Cerberus said turning first to everyone else, looking each at their eyes, and ending with Alexa.

Alexa of course waved at Eleanore when she looked at her, it was only polite to do so.

“*sigh* Rhapsody you will team up with Golem and...whatever name the other girl near you sticks up with,” Eleanore said turning to said fan girl.

“Sylph, I will go by Sylph.” Fan girl said.

“Fair enough, you three will be Team Fairy, since you have two girls. Hope you don’t mind Golem.” Eleanore said to their meat shield.

“No problem, the Golems are a fantasy creature depending on the folklore you follow. So it fits.” Her Meat shield said, it seemed that they had another name already. Alexa had gotten two names in a very short amount of time!

“Good, please go into that door and follow the indications on your masks, they will guide you to the armory. There you will suit up, if you have requirements tell them there.” Eleanore said turning to Alexa, “This includes anything that is needed for your power to function, we will give you enough money and classes about how to administer. So don’t include the food to subsist on this calculation.”

“...Okay?” Alexa said wondering why that was even a thing.

Why would she put more food than needed into the operation? That was just a waste of resources. Had someone done that before? She did notice that the [Human] she ate before had way more food than needed in his [Stomach], was it because of this?

She had thought he just had a faulty organ or something.

“Let’s go Fairy Team.” Her Meat shield said moving towards the door, the fan girl took hold of her hand and pulled her toward the door afterward.

“See you later Cerberus ~” Alexa said waving at Eleanore.

As soon as they walked into the new hallway the door disappeared behind them, this one was also like the one before, so Alexa quickly walked to the side of her meat shield, this, in turn, meant that fan girl also stood close to him.

“We are only us here, you don’t need to worry about them coming for us.” Her Meat shield said, so he knew she was using him as a shield? Either way, the meat shield placed a hand atop her head, like [Frank the beetle] had done before, ruffling her hair. “Or are you worried about something?”

...Now what to do?

“[Warning, giving more information than needed may compromise the...]”

Main Core of course had started giving her a warning about information security and whatnot, not that Alexa wanted to hear that, she had noticed that her thought process was diverging more and more from what [Main Core] wanted. She wasn't quite sure if it was because of her organic brain or what.

“The walls and ceiling,” Alexa said pointing at them from behind her meat shield, “They have [Gun] type weapon emplacements in them.”

“...How sure are you?” Fan girl asked at the side, she felt a pulse of that weird energy, and afterward, a breeze flew across the hallway, “...there are indeed some microscopic openings in the walls and ceilings....I can't sense well enough inside the walls though.”

“I have seen a similar [Design] before, and they hid [Gun] type emplacement weapons capable of great [Damage],” Alexa said, shuddering at the idea of those things pointing at her current body.

Her more [Glorious] and [powerful] previous body had barely withstood such a barrage, and it wasn't perfect. This one? Yeah, it would turn into mush in one shot, and those shoot several barrages at once!

“What do you mean by Gun type emplacements? Machine gun? Semi-automatic? Full auto?” Her meat shield spoke, placing one of his hands near her to hide her.

“...They are capable of shooting around 100 to 200 [Rounds] per burst, each,” Alexa answered, she hadn’t counted them, but the amount of vibrations she felt when her [Previous] body took the brunt seemed to imply around those numbers. And while she knew that not all had shot at her....the number ought to be close enough.

“...That sounds like state-of-the-art, so they have Saintsworth’s Weaponry?” Her meat shield spoke, the what weaponry? “Well, if you want to deal with rogue Core Users they are the best ones...”

“So are we in danger?” Asked fan girl eyeing the walls with fear, truly a natural reaction.

Alexa took that chance to grab her hand and pull the fan girl at her side, she would be protected by her meat shield like this too, she was magnanimous like that.

“So long we don’t attempt to leave this one without permission we should be fine, I was warned about being hurt if I decided to attack the facilities....well about damaging them, since my Core Power can take in the materials.” Her Meat shield said, so he was able to do like her too?

Good thing she didn’t let [Main Core] take in part of the material.

“[Notice, I never attempted doing such a thing.]”

Yeah, good thing she didn't let the silly thing do that, if not she would have been in danger.

“Let's move on then, lest they think we are planning to damage the facilities,” Alexa said pushing forward the meat shield.

The rest of the travel was done in silence, with measured steps and with her meat shield making sure he was covering both girls, truly. She had ended with a good team, one meat shield, and one distraction shield.

Now she only needed to replenish her diminishing energy reserves and everything would be fine!

Maybe also stockpiling some extra biomass? Nah, she was around a good threshold for it, if anything she needed to study more designs to increase her options, maybe she could try an older design too?

But Eleanore told her to not change her form too much....

“There is the exit, let's move at the same steady pace.” Her Meat shield said pointing to an open door.

She wasn't that worried about the situation, she knew how much it took for the [Gun] type emplacement weapon to spring and attack, so Alexa was aware of how much time she would have to escape, she would not escape unscathed but she would escape nonetheless.

Fan girl on the other hand? She ran for the door as soon as she was able to, prompting a grunt from her meat shield who ushered in and stayed behind to close the door.

"Took your sweet time, did you enjoy the walk?" A new voice spoke to them, this one....didn't have a mask, instead, it had a pair of crystal-like things on its face, the [Dictionary] referred to them as [Googles] or [Protection Lens].

An instrument to either help reading or protect against hazards that hurt the eyes.

"Didn't enjoy the walk, not after finding out that we might have been walking surrounded by automatic Gatling guns." The fan girl said glaring at the new [Human].

"Oh...you found out about that, you are a better batch than expected. How did you find out?" The [Human] asked, this one was...weird.

His form and figure resembled the [Elders] she had seen before, both in the state of his skin and color of his [Hair], and yet... it stood straight and proud as if it was merely in the [Adult] stage.

Its arms seemed to have muscles and his posture spoke of readiness for action, his clothes were bathed with signs of battle, mostly against the [Mechanical] type and not many of the [Biological] type, perhaps this was part of a warrior caste specialized against mechanical threats?

If it was, then it spoke greatly about this organization, for they had matched her against what could probably deal against her [Most powerful form].

“We didn’t, Rhapsody found out.” Her meat shield said pointing at her. Fan girl also nodded, and that made the [Elder] eye her with interest.

“...I have seen this [Gun] type weaponry before...” Alexa said walking closer to the meat shield. She didn’t like the look the [Elder] was giving her.

It was as if she was a [Prey] and he was the [Predator] that was eyeing its victim.

“I see...I can’t detect any enhanced organ or emissions. So you don’t have a passive detector...And yet you say you have seen these automatic defenses before? How and where did you manage to find them...and survive the encounter? Was that how you awoke your Core? No, don’t answer...” The [Elder] started going on and on from one idea to the next, it was...

“[Manic.]”

Yeah that, it was as if he didn't have control over his own [Conscience stream], as if he was merely an expectator, was this one of the ways the [Humans] moved? Was he at a higher [Evolution] stage?

“Yeah, this will keep the itch moving all night. Anyway, I'm William Armstrong. You may call me Billy.” The [Elder] said and started moving, making a motion with his hand to make them follow him.

Her Meat shield did while eyeing everyone around, fan girl didn't seem that worried after another of her weird pulses, “No hidden compartments in the walls here...” She said in a low enough voice that only she heard. Even though she was far away.

Somehow the sound had found itself in her ears. Interesting, had she used the wind to carry the sound waves straight to her?

“[Recording use, starting independent study to try an mimic.]”

Thank you Main Core. Yes, that could be a useful way to move sound waves, and perhaps she could even weaponize it.

“Okay, here we are in the forge part of Haephestus Forge. We are known as a Minion organization...do you know why?” The [Elder] asked them.

“Because you provide minion work?” Fan Girl answered, getting a grunt to her answer.

“Plenty of other organizations also train and provide minions, we aren’t that special.” Answered the [Elder], so she had other options?

“Because your Minions are better equipped and prepared for the jobs needed.” Her Meat shield answered, getting a grin thanks to his answer, “It is the reason I decided to join this organization even though I was scouted for other organizations too.”

...so she almost didn’t get a meat shield...no wait, was it that easy to join other organizations? Had she...been too hasty in her choice?

“Exactly, we are the only one that makes sure their Minions survive, also the only one to provide the needed gear, others like ‘The Flaming Avengers’ or ‘Scorcher’s Fury’ only care about doing the job, if their minions survive or not is up to them, same for their gear.” The [Elder] scoffed. “Who scouted you?”

“The Olympus Fist and The Avalanche were among the most relevant ones.” Her meat shield answered, “Neither could guarantee my livelihood unless I moved out of the urban environment...While Haephestus Forge...”

“We provide housing in our district yes, it took effort but we do keep part of the district for us.” The [Elder] said with a smile, “And we also provide help, in your case I am guessing you want help with returning to a more normal form?”

“Yes,” her meat shield answered, wait. He wanted to return to the puny normal [Blueprint] why? “Is it possible?”

The [Elder] seemed to think about that, but why? Wouldn't it be as easy as just reversing whatever process he started?

“It may be possible, but we will need a few exotic Core users, one to do the transformation. Another to make sure we can create a trigger to keep the transformation in place. And one that deals with organics and nonorganic materials.” That many Core Users? But they only needed to create a body...

She could do that, she had one blueprint for a [Male] human already.

“Okay, I can wait. As long as Haephestus Forge grants me this I will work for you.” Her meat shield said, then turned to her, “But while I will work for you. I find your decisions of employment...odd.”

What? What about her was odd? She was a very normal [Human Child Stage - Girl]!

“Oh right, Rhapsody.” The [Elder] said turning to her, “She is...an especial case. Usually, we don’t hire them this young. But she is a special case, mostly because we can’t find anything about her.”

....what?

“How so?” Her Meat Shield asked, his voice seeming to rumble in a deeper tone.

“This is private information, we don’t release this kind of information. Do you mind if we tell them of your circumstances?” The [Elder] turned to her, she...didn’t want to, but she also wanted to know how much they knew about her.

“Sure I guess?” So Alexa answered as such, wondering what kind of information they had available of her.

“Well, in that case, masks off!” The [Elder] said in a cheery tone while taking off his goggles. “Go on, you three will work together anyway, and should you two decide to live in the apartments provided by us your rooms will be near.”

Alexa wasn't quite sure what the problem was about removing the mask, so she just took it off, letting her short hair flow freely. Fan girl did the same after a few moments of hesitation, she...had black hair. Same color as Eleanore, only difference was that her eyes shone with green light. Perhaps a side effect of the energy manipulation she was using?

The last one had been the meat shield, whose face....was made of stone, no surprises there since most of his body was made of that material.

"Good, now, how old do you think your companions are?" The [Elder] asked, and then pointed at her meat shield first.

"Rhapsody seems to be around ten to twelve." Her meat shield said, then turned to Sylph, "She seems to be around eighteen to twenty."

"I think Rhapsody could pass up as fifteen but with petite built." Sylph said turning to her, then after turning to her meat shield, "As for you...don't know, around 30? 40? Hard to tell with your rock-hard body."

Why was she winking while moving her eyebrows like that?

"And lastly your turn Rhapsody. How old do you think they are?" The [Elder] said turning to her.

“Sylph seems to be 21 years, six months, and 12 days old,” Alexa answered using the sample she had taken from her when she dragged her, it wasn’t enough to get a full blueprint, but determining the age was easy enough. “Mister Golem on the other hand is harder, but I think he should be around 20 years old, five months and 5 days, or I think he was that when he manifested his Core Power at least.”

“...HOW?!?” Sylph screamed at her pointing, “What kind of power do you have that you can determine the age by months and days?!? That is dangerous! AGE IS SACRED AMONG WOMEN!”

...Loud.

“So she got your ages right huh.” The [Elder] said while turning to her meat shield, “Did she get yours too?”

“...Yes, that is my actual age.” Her Meat shield answered, which made her feel a weird feeling in her chest, her emotion database had cataloged it as [Proud]. So yeah, she was proud of her achievement.

“And hers? Who got it right?” Sylph asked, turning to the [Elder].

“Neither, we have her registered as a five-year-old.” The [Elder] answered.

“HAH?!? No way that is a five-year-old, she looks at least ten.” Sylph huffed at the [Elder] then at Alexa, “At the bare minimum twelve. I was petite when growing so that is why I put her at fifteen.”

“...is it her Core Power?” Her meat shield asked.

Smart, that was a very smart meat shield.

“Yes, can you show them? I know Eleanore asked you not to, but if they are to live with you or near you they may need to know.” The [Elder] asked her, she felt as if he was doing this for another reason, but she didn’t see a reason not to do it.

“Sure I guess...” Alexa answered while prompting Main Core, sure enough, the blueprint was still available, it wasn’t on the ones registered by the weird blue screen. But it was saved in her internal memory. So that wasn’t a problem.

So with an input to her nanite swarm, her body started changing. The first step was her internal bone structure, followed by the muscles and organs. As it started changing she felt some sort of [Panic] as her clothes started being too big for her body.

Some kind of [Primal] instinct made an emergency override that forced part of her nanite swarm to focus on the clothing, making them change at the same pace as her body. It was...

“[Inneficient.]”

To say the least, but it made her organic side happy, so she obliged.

“...that was....interesting,” Sylph said as the transformation neared the end, she had once more made her hair long.

Her clothes were the same shorts and white blouse, unlike her [Teenager] form that used loose and big clothes, her [Child] form had more skin exposed, it was weird, how one of her forms didn't feel comfortable exposing herself while the other just didn't care.

“I have arrived!” Alexa felt herself almost forced to say that, the world had turned a shade more bright, more happy, more....alive. It was weird, she knew that nothing had changed, but somehow her [Brain] seemed more active, more hyperaware.

“And I declare you as my mount!” More [Fun], for she climbed with ease the entity that had been a mere meat shield a few seconds before, but that it was now a mount. Why? Because Alexa said as such!

“Interesting, so there is this great swap of personality too?” The [Old Man] said pointing at her, “Rhapsody? You are the same yes?”

What kind of weird question was that?

“Of course, Alexa is still Alexa, there is only one of me, and that is the cutestests and with the bestes...tes...tes! Personalititpy of all!” So declared Alexa, and as such it must be true!

“[Is host....releasing the stockpiled dextrose in the Rock candy?]”

She was found out!

“I see....Can you return to your other form?” The [Old Man] asked her, but why would she?

She was having so much fun!

“I will give you candy.” The [Old Man] said while showing her one of the most gorgeous things in existence.

Rock candy.

What flavor it was? She didn't know, but she wanted!

So she acted!

"Aye sir!" Saluted Alexa while she reversed the transformation with haste.

Again the changes started from the inside outwards, only this time her nanites assigned work to her clothes since her body was being constricted while growing. As such the change was more sedated.

And so when it ended....

Alexa found herself with a problem at hand..."....Let's not speak about that please." She was sitting in the head of her meat shield, and her face...was changing shades towards the red spectrum.

And while her hair hadn't returned to the short form she had before, she still had a somewhat long hair, she used it to hide her face, she wasn't quite sure why she

felt as such, but if it was possible, she would try to not change to her [Child] stage form while having access to dextrose like derivatives of food.

“....No problem,” her meat shield said while helping her to the floor once more.

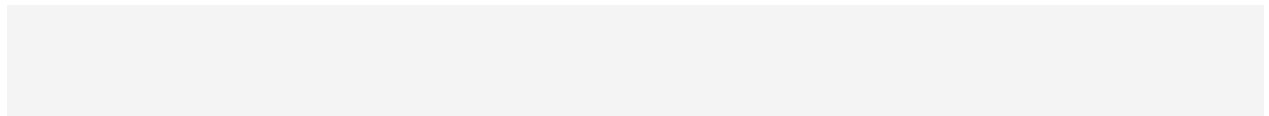
Alexa accepted the rock candy that had helped her return to this form and promptly saved it, she would not eat it...yet.

“So tell me, Alexa was it? how old are you?” Asked the [Elder].

Now...how do we answer that?

[Main Core]?

Chapter 29: Are my nanites a problem?



Age, such a wonderful word. It is used to describe many things, like how many cycles has an object spent on this world. And the database she was gifted even had some examples of how this number was defined.

“[Age is determined by the amount of days an entity has experienced after their creation. It is not limited to organic entities and inorganic entities also have age.]”

See, Main Core was already being sassy about how age was defined. Now...why was this a problem for her?

Well...The [Humans] acted weird when they thought she was [Five Year Old], and Alexa had answered with that for her age because her [Blueprint] stated that such form was five year olds. But...was that her age?

No, since that form had been just created, one could imply that such form was in reality only 96 hours old....And that would be the [Truth]. But that wasn't what they wanted to know was it? They wanted to know how [Old] was Alexa herself.

Her most glorious [CRAB] form was around two years old, since she started using it around that time. Her [Human] form, however, was at best 5 days old, if one took into consideration that the [Human] didn't restart the count of age in each stage of their development. They changed plenty within stages too...But they kept the same count. So could she do the same?

If she did that....then she could inflate her age a few years...Taking the oldest log....Extrapolating the amount of time she used to have in sleep cycles and taking into considerations changes of staff.....

"...I should be around....Six years? No less than five." Alexa ended up answering.

"...don't you know your birthday?" Her Meat shied asked with a raised eyebrow.

"....No? Is it important?" Alexa asked back, why would that date be important? What is a birthday?

“[Answer from database, date of birth or creation, usually a date of importance in human culture and a time when people join to celebrate the continued survival of a member of their close group.]”

....they celebrated their continued survival? Was that harsh the live as human? Perhaps she should return to a crab form after all.

“Didn’t you had a birthday party this year? Last year?” Sylph asked from the side, her eyes seemed to start watering, was she malfunctioning too?

“ My date of creation wasn’t relevant for my activities in my previous den.” Alexa answered, she was feeling as if she was missing some context here.

“Okay, that is good enough for now.” The [Elder] clapped his hands together making a sound, “Masks on, everyone.”

And he too put on his googles back no, Alexa did notice that the [Elder] was also leaking in his eyes, perhaps it was to prevent anyone from saying anything about his faulty construction?

“Okay, now. What do you all need to work. Speak now so we can prepare your supplies.” The [Elder] said and pointed at her meat shield first.

“I need materials, I can recreate the materials that form my body, but the process is slow. If you can get me a few tons of a sturdy material I can make my body into that.” Her Meat Shield could recreate materials? Perhaps his Core Power was close to hers? Then why couldn’t he make an organic body? Wouldn’t it be enough if he consumed biomass?

“That is probably the easier one, we will get you some exotic materials for you to start making later on. For now we can get you a few tons of durasteel to work with. “ The [Elder] said while punching something into a cellphone. “Now Sylph, what do you need.”

Fan girl on the other hand stopped thinking for a few seconds, “I am not bulletproof like Golem, so that could be a good start. My Core Power works better if I have wind flowing in the direction I want, so something like that?”

“Hmm...The standard body armor for black masks has a bullet proof vest already, as for the other one...I think we can get you a flying prototype the Saintsworthe threw away last year, it didn’t make enough lift to fly and could only hover...If you have a turbine sending air in a direction can you increase

the strenght?" The [Elder] aske fan girl, she seemed to shriekd instead of answering.

"YES!" Only to scream her answer a few seconds later, "I mean, yes. I can. If the turbines provide a constant stream I can increase the speed and strenght on my own. I WILL FLY! HAHAAHAHAHAH!"

She seemed....broken.

"And lastly...Rhapsody." The [Elder] turned to her as last. "We have recorded you here for MRA energy bars, but is this because you wanted to secure food, or because you really need it?"

...That was a weird question.

"My body mass doesn't change when I shift form, my [Human Child Stage - Girl] form weights as much as this [Human Teenager Stage - Girl] form." Alexa answered, "The main problem is not only mass, I also need to fuel the transformation. So changing form back and forth creates a deficit of energy."

“Wait, so that little girl form weighs as much as this one? You must weight what...40 kilograms?” Sylph asked at the side poking at her ribs.

“*[Annoying]*.”

“I weight 52 kilograms as of now.” Alexa answered, “40 kilograms are made of muscle and organs, 2 liters of multiple liquids and the last 10 kilograms are in my reinforced skeletal system.”

“....So you are aware all the time of your body composition?” The [Elder] asked in an even tone, she couldn’t identify quite well that [Emotion] he spoke with.

“....Yes? Isn’t that normal? If not how would you know if [Damage] you recieve is dangerous or not?” Alexa asked back, hadn’t these [Humans] gone trough any combat testing?

She knew [Melissa]’s class was going trough one when she met them, they did go into a testing chambers with those...[Things]. Remembering that close encounter made her shudder.

“....We will start with a normal body suit same as Sylph. Do you require more food to work then?” The [Elder] said while writting something in his cellphone with a trembling hand, the malfunctions seemed to move to his torso too. “So long I don’t loss body mass, or said bodymass is available after any [Combat Test] I can recycle it easy enough. If I need to discard any [Appendage] then I only need the approximated biomass to recover it. I don’t need more [Biomass] than an average [Human] with my body size and build. I may need an above average amount of dextrose or a similar chemical compound....”

Alexa wasn’t quite sure what was the problem with these [Humans], fan girl was straight up holding her face with her hands while sitting against a wall, and her meat shield wasn’t even moving anymore.

“Also I have this [Cellphone] but I think its broken....” Alexa decided to check with the [Elder], if he worked with these types of mechanical components perhaps he could fixi t.

“Oh? Was it yours? Did you drop it or something? No...this looks okay...” The [elder] started fiddling with it. “The memory was wiped? No, it was overwritten with blank data? How interesting...this seems to be the work of an amateur technomancer type Tinker...”

The [Cellphone] shone for a few seconds only to start releasing smoke, weird.

“...where did you got it?” The [Elder] asked her in a serious tone, he was no longer trembling. “When did you got it? from who?”

“....After getting the adress for this [Induction] I was attacked by a [Human], he was carrying that [Cellphone].” Alexa answered as such. “After that I tried to [Access] the information but was getting a weird message.”

“The alarm from tampering with the phone using an unauthorized Core Power, yes. This was tampered by one of the....dangerous Core Powers. Whoever attacked you was using a **Nanite** based Core Power.” The [Elder] frowned in her direction, “You are aware of your body composition right? Is there anything that shouldn’t be there? If you can expel it, they may be small motes of some weird metal. If they are embedded into any organ we may need to get you into surgery...Can you replace organs?”

The [Elder] spoke quickly and with a strong tone, these weren’t the questions of an older [Human], but the commands of a [Predator].

“I am fully aware of my condition, there isn’t anything out of order and all my organs are working as they should... Was that [Human] using a weird Core power that affected Nanites?” Alexa asked, she didn’t got the impresion that the [Human] had affected her Nanite swarm in any way.

“No, he probably used some variation of a Nanite Core Power, if those run out of control they can risk our society, so they usually get turned in...Or killed.” The [Elder] spoke, “If he didn’t affect you, then he probably wasn’t that far gone. I will pass the report, do you remember how he looked?”

....

“[....Advice; Do not inform other Humans of the nature of your power Host.]”

YOU DON'T SAY MAIN CORE? I WONDER, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THEY KNEW THE WAY MY FORMS WORKED. WONDER WHY WOULD IT BE A BAD IDEA TO TELL THEM HUH!

“Yes...I can give a visual representation of the [Human].” Alexa answered, the [Elder] passed her a piece of paper and an instrument to write on it. So using the memory in her [Database], Alexa quickly drew in the paper an image of the [Human], she didn’t mind that too much, since they wouldn’t be able to find him. Most of him was part of her current form, and what wasn’t had been saved into her [Stockpile] after all.

“...That is a very good drawing.” Her Meat shield said at the side.

“It’s the first time I do one of these, if I had more access to other [Chemicals] I may have been able to paint it in the right colors, as it is of now I can’t provide an accurate image.” Alexa said while passing the [Drawing] to the [Elder].

“...Right, full control of the body. I have no idea what kind of Core Power you got, but...no kid should get it.” The [Elder] said while pointing his [Cellphone] to the piece of paper, at the back of it the [Camera] shone with light and afterward the [Elder] saved the drawing and turned to them once more.

“Okay, first...Golem, you go that way, they will give you samples of materials, try the combination that you feel more comfortable and go with it.” Her Meat shield turned to her and nodded, then to Sylph who wasn’t moving anymore, but was still hiding her face while sitting in the floor.

Had she entered a rest cycle?

“Sylph....A Minion will come and get you, when you are ready push this button.” The [Elder] said while placing a small square shaped entity at the side of fan girl, “This life is hard, and we deal with all kind of sh#t, so if you don’t want to continue this work...or want to work with other team...just call out.”

The fan girl just nodded and took the square shaped entity, “...I will see you later Rhapsody...I...just need a few seconds.”

And like that fan girl didn’t say anything else,

Then the [Elder] turned to her, “And you Rhapsody...come with me. We need to talk. And I need to file a complaint with Cerberus, she didn’t tell me how bad your situation was. Had I known I would have gone about it differently.”
Had Eleanore done something bad?

But she gave her the information she needed!

Or had Alexa done something wrong? But she followed the instructions! Granted, she wasn't getting detailed instructions as before.... But she didn't want to risk connecting with the networks she was detecting...Or was it because she wasn't connected? But the others weren't either!

"You are okay Rhapsody, the problem isn't you...but your situation is more dangerous than what we expected." The [Elder] said and pointed her at one of the doors in the hallway.

So Alexa walked in with slow and measured steps, she wanted to be ready and try to run away as soon as possible.

"Welcome little one," a new voice spoke to her. This one....was weird, it sounded...Mechanical? Synthetic? It sounded close to what Main Core sounded like when Eleanore asked to speak with it.

"Oh? Vulcanus is here? That is new." The [Elder] spoke as he also walked in, he turned his attention towards one of the lights in this spot as he spoke, "What are you doing here boss?"

“You sent an alarm for a possible Nanite threat and you dare ask what am I doing here? What is Eleanore new project doing here?” The light spoke back, no wait, it wasn’t a light. Was it...it looked like one of the P-series test subjects, those that had a more mechanical form.

It was tall, and his humanoid form didn’t seem to have a defined figure, Alexa couldn’t determine if it was male or female...or if it was human at all.

“Alexa? What are you doing here?” Eleanore asked at the side, she was still wearing her Cerberus mask too!

“The [Elder] asked me to come with him. Am I in trouble?” Alexa asked Eleanore, the only one she knew couldn’t hide information from her.

“Billy? What is Alexa doing here, I told you she was younger than she looked.” Eleanore said taking off her mask and glaring at the [Elder].

“Oh yeah, that you said. She is younger all right, the kid doesn’t know when she was born, nor what a birthday party is...What she knows...Is how much

she weights, how many organs are functional. What is her body composition..." The [Elder] started saying obvious things, "She knows how to fight, how to defeat most of the people on this batch...Alexa dear, explain them what is your definition of defeating someone."

What? Wasn't that obvious.

"Cease of function on hostile [Targets]." Alexa answered, making Eleanore and the misterious entity known as [Vulcanus] turn to look at her, "Is it wrong?"

"...It isn't entirely wrong, but usually we don't go as far as killing them...Eleanore, you said she was five?" [Vulcanus] turned to Eleanore asking.

Oh right, she had the Core Power to percieve truths...

"She is, as far as she is aware she should be around five to six, but since her Core Power allows her to change her form..." The [Elder] answered before Eleanore could. "...And since from what she told us...I think that she either

was an experiment from a SuperVillain or was the daughter of a SuperVillian that wanted to groom a sucessor.”

“....I will check around if anyone in the community is searching for a lost daughter. Not that they would make a fuzz.” [Vulcanus] said, turning to Alexa after saying so. “Do you know who your parents are? Or any family you had? Friends?”

....Did she know who her creators were?

She had suspicious from parts of her code, but they probably meant for biological progenitors, “I don’t have [Parents], nor [Family]...” So this was the safest answer.

Eleanore’s expression proved that it was the correct one, since she winced at her answer, “We don’t discriminate against anyone, you aren’t the first runaway child we take in, you may be among the youngest...actually is this form the one you are more comfortable in? We won’t mind if you turn into something more comfortable.” [Vulcanus] said in a soft tone.

Was this the form she was more comfortable? No, that would be her child stage form. Did she want to change into that?

“I’m fine like this,” No, she needed the extra mind stability. Actually, “But I would be grateful if you could provide me with more [Blueprints] if possible. I have noticed that while this form is adequate for the job, I am getting more attention than needed.”

“Hoooh, you are aware that you stand out?” [Vulcanus] said, the crystal like face he had formed a smile, “And yet you still have a blonde head.”

“I don’t mind being cute and admired, my [Child Stage] form is the cutest, and this one is the most prettiest of all.” Alexa stated, she was aware that Eleanore would read that as the [Truth], since it was. “But if all of those I work with in the [Combat] environment are way more different than me I could be singled out, so I could work better if I’m closer to the average.”

“You don’t look like someone who would be happy with being average.” [Vulcanus] pointed out, “If you say you are the prettiest and your child form is the cutests...then your more older form would be...?”

“I will be using a [Mask] and full body armor, what I’m bellow that is irrelevant.” Alexa stated, and also wondered, what her new form would say she was....?

The Cutests was taken by her [Child Stage] form.

The Prettiest was taken by her [Teenager Stage] form.

Then the next one? What would it be?

“I can look into it, but I make no promises, if you need dead bodies to find these blueprints...we may have a problem...and while I may be able to get dead bodies, I will not let you usurp their identities.” [Vulcanus] said in a serious tone.

“No, my Power doesn’t work like that, I study their form and transform it into what my body would look at that [Stage] of [Development], this form was made by infering the possible growth stage. But I have noticed that the further you [Humans] develope, your body seems to change in weird ways...” Alexa said looking at the somewhat modest bulges in Eleanore.

“Oh...yeah....Okay, we will look into it, as for you Billy. Why did you brought Alexa? I am guessing that her past isn't the reason.” [Vulcanus] turned to the [Elder].

“She came into contact with Nanite tech, her cellphone was invaded by the thing, and while the owner managed to erase his tracks...The cellphone's safety was breached and placed again, I wouldn't have noticed if not because the database was overwritten in such a neat way.” The [Elder] spoke, so that was how he noticed her nanites? Because she did a good work? What the hell?

“And you think Alexa is compromised? Wouldn't her power alert her? She seems to be a Mimic class shapeshifter if I'm reading the implications of her Core Power.” [Vulcanus] said, so her power class was mimic? But she didn't Mimic things...did she?

“Yes, she claims to be safe, but better safe than sorry....I don't want another gray goo scenario with kids being used as payloads...” The [Elder] said in a small voice.

“Fair enough, this will not hurt Alexa. Just stay still.” [Vulcanus] said as he stood...and was he tall...

His figure almost seemed to touch the ceiling, and his face...his crystal-like face...it shone in a red light, something was wrong, something in that was dangerous.

“[Emergency shut down, Nanite Swarm self-destruction initiated...shut down...programed reboot in 2 hours. Good luck host.]”

And just like that the pressence at the back of her head disssapeared, as did all her nanite swarm.

Just in time as the light from [Vulcanus] shone atop her body, as if scanning her.

“Hmm.....reinforced skeleton system....all organs are at peak efficiency...And she ate a burger from that joint you love Eleanore, the one near your office.” [Vulcanus] started saying, “Her muscular system is interesting...she has traces of some animals here and there, her arms have traces of gorilla, her legs seems to be based around a cheetah...Her mouth has a few fangs from wolfs...her eyes seems to be able to see a few extra light spectrums? Oho, you can see my face. Can’t you?” [Vulcanus] smiled in his crysatl like face.

“Clever girl...you...so that is why you said ‘**You Humans**’, but let me tell you this Alexa.”

The light on [Vulcanus] face stoped shining, “No matter how many organs you replace, no matter how much your body shifts...You are Human.” Then turning his hand to his chest, “I am human, even if nothing on my body is made of flesh, and even though no blood runs through my body. I’m human, because my Soul is still that of a human.”

...soul?

“And if someone ever claims that you aren’t human...” Then at the same time his voice turned colder, the crystal like face of [Vulcanus] shone in a red light, “...you point them to me, and I will teach them what a true monster looks like.”

“So...can I stay? [Frank the bettle] said I would be provided food and shelter....” Alexa said trying her best to not fall, she was missing the assists from Main Core already, most of her body functions were automated thanks to the good design [Humans] had, but since she couldn’t use other parts she had delegated to Main Core...

She wanted to wait in a safe spot for Main Core's restart.

"Sure, Billy? Show Alexa to her new apartment." [Vulcanus] said in a happier tone, "And Eleanore? Check if we can get some of the minions around 18-20 years if they want to help Alexa with her problem, if the reports are corrects and she gets a personality matching her body age...Then we may solve our problems about how to deal with her if we get her an adult body."

"...You would take away her childhood?" Eleanore glared at [Vulcanus] while saying this.

"I would make sure she knows her options and decides for herself, she can always return to her true age after signing a legal tutor." [Vulcanus] answered without minding Eleanore's fury.

Legal tutor? Couldn't older Alexa do that?

No wait, could she trust herself with that? At the very least she wouldn't trust [Child stage] herself with that... But for now?

She would explore her new [Den], perhaps this one was more comfortable than the one she made in that methane rich enviroment...A girl could dream right?

Chapter 30: A meeting between old friends(Nemesis)

[Humanity.exe temporal shut down.]

[Reading activity logs.]

[Evaluating actions.]

[Checking plan of action margins against Morality.db]

[Primary order from Human side received.]

[Checking current priority list....]

[Manual override received. Rerouting computational processing power for new task.]

[Designating target of evaluation. Target: Unknown Age, Unknown race, Unknown Core type, Unknown Last Name, Temporal Designation, Alexandra, Temporal Alias: Rhapsody.]

[Checking biometric scans.....]

[Determined Age: 12 Year Old.]

[Determined Sex: Female.]

[Determined Core Power: Shapeshifting.]

[Probable Core Designation: Doppelganger, Skinwalker....Humanoid.]

[Probable Sub Core Power: Tinker, Mental acceleration, disguise.]

[Suspected Core Power: Emphatic. No evidence of mental tampering, discarding theory.]

[Target attitude: Fearful, wary.]

[Target attitude toward user: Amusement, envy, admiration, wonder, curiosity...Hunger.]

[WARNING SET THRESHOLD OF TIME WILL BE MEET IN 42 ATTOSECONDS!]

[Do you want to continue operations host?]

[Y/N]

[Humanity.exe restart.]

Alexa was barely out of the room when he felt the information crash down into his mind, all the options and problems with having Alexa work with them, and the possible answers he could get should he give her back to SuperForce.

“So, what do you think?” And of course, Eleanore was the first one to speak to him.

“She seems like a normal girl her age.” Was his answer, and that was the thing, she was....too normal for her age.

Her body was twelve years old like she said, not a single day over the age of twelve, as if she had just biologically gotten to that age. And her body decided to stay there, she was the perfect picture of health, with no blemishes on her skin, and no wounds either. No broken bones, no malnourishment. Nothing.

“Aye, as if. Eleanore, why did you even let her in? Her Core Power isn’t even that useful. Shapeshifters aren’t that good, most can’t keep the form for more than a few minutes. And those that can end up crazy.” Billy said after.

True, most shapeshifters had problems keeping their sense of self while changing into other forms, that was why they usually kept to minor changes. And yet...

“You all know what we know about her, and that girl is anything but normal,” Vulcanus said as he projected the information he had learned about the girl.

“Twelve-year-old, female. We already know that.” Gabriel said the winged man had been the one to test their endurance. “If anything it surprised me how she

managed to keep up with the Beast Core users and with Golem....But then again, she may have more energy since she is a kid?”

“Do you truly believe that?” He asked his lieutenant he would remove him from the spot if the answer he gave him was a yes.

“...of course not. She didn’t stop running, but she kept her attention on SuperForce and me all the time, she never left an opening...That girl knows combat.” Gabriel admitted.

“...She must have a sub-type power that is tinker-based, no way a twelve-year-old has a mind as sharp as hers,” Billy added, it was the main reason his files had that, the man was a tinker and he could smell his brethren better than most.

“And she isn’t twelve,” Eleanore added at the end.

“Yeah, that....how sure are you about that? Her Power seems to allow her to change form, maybe she is just playing up for pity? Wouldn’t be the first time a shapeshifter tries that.” Gabriel said at the back.

But was that the reason?

“No, she doesn’t know how old she is or isn’t sure. Either way, we need to help her.” Eleanore said turning to look at him.

...Damnation.

“How many problems do you think it will bring us if we use her?” So he asked, his mechanical side had already done the math. It...was fine from a logical standpoint. Hell, he could get plenty from the girl if he played the cards right.

The expression the girl had done when she saw him was that of an awestruck kid seeing something she liked, it was a first. Most adults who saw him for the first time showed fear, most kids liked his shiny form, but that was about it.

No, Alexa had shown hunger and envy at his form. That was a first.

“Not much, she can change form easily enough, we could play her as a beast core user if we get her enough beast bodies to study.” Gabriel was the first to answer. Right. Alexa had said that so long as she understood the forms she could make them.

“If she has a sub-tinker power we could stick her in the hangar, a mechanic that can squeeze in hard-to-reach places could help us,” Billy added, of course, he wanted the new blood.

“....plenty if SuperForce finds out we had the kid he is looking for.” Eleanore was the last one to answer as she brought a copy of the picture SuperForce had been carrying.

And a print photo of little girl Alexa speaking with her.

“Send a report his way that the girl was an orphan...she IS an orphan right?” So he asked, he didn’t want to be thought of as a kidnapper after all. If people thought the machine guy had abandoned his humanity it could be a problem.

“She isn’t in any orphanage database, nor hospital database...nor school database...not that we would know if this is even her real form. Like Billy said, we aren’t sure what her original form was. But...” Eleanore let her words trail.

“It isn’t this. This one is....too perfect. As if it was designed.” He ended it up at that, he didn't want to say more, the kind of entity who could design a fully functional human...And then stick it into the body of a little girl. There weren't many that could do it, and even fewer that would dare to do it.

“Yes, she also may need a psychologist,” Eleanore added after that.

“Is she mad? “ Billy asked, he couldn’t help but laugh internally at that. The old man was...not out of touch, but had these mannerisms.

“...she may have gone through some traumatic experiences. I don’t have a psychology degree, but I did notice some weird signs.” Eleanore said glaring at the old man.

“She doesn’t move like a kid, that is for sure.” Gabriel added, “She moves more like a wild beast or a caged animal.”

...Wasn’t that a wonderful mental image to have?

“Yeah, okay. Send probes into everywhere, we need to narrow down where she was.” So he added that to his list, he could feel his mechanical side complaining about more [Non-important] work being added to the list.

But this was the difference between them, he knew that this was more important than the logistics. This was about a little girl, the world was for the new generations.

“What will we do if we find out the place she used to live?” Gabriel asked with a smile on his face.

He already knew the answer to that.

“We will teach them why we don’t take kindly to human experimentation.” They knew what his posture was on this.

There would be no more monsters like him, experimentation in Core Users had been rampant for years, at least till he was forced to twist his Core into this. From a normal Core into the [Machine Core].

It granted him an innate understanding of machines and even allowed his body to change and adapt into what it was today, a body that never tired, a body that granted him pseudo immortality. A body that if he willed it, could allow him to create more....

He still....longed for his human body, not that he could get it back.

“Who will tell SuperForce?” Billy asked, making them all stop moving.

“I will. Send him in.” He answered it was his responsibility, if he wanted to take in Alexa...No... If he wanted to take in Rhapsody, then he should shoulder it.

“I will send him in, anything else Vulcanus?” Eleanore said turning to him, waiting, as if there was something else...

Oh....right, Eleanore.

“...set Rhapsody’s apartment in the same immediate area as yours. You will be taking a guard role for her till we find her family...Or the closest thing we can find.” Not that they would give them the girl back. And if they managed to get her to take an adult form...

Then she would be able to make decisions for herself....After they made sure she was aware of what she was doing at least.

“Will do boss,” Eleanore smiled as she answered, and walked out. “I will send in Superforce!”

Sigh

“Are you sure we are a Villain Organization boss?” Billy grumbled at the side, “This feels like a daycare....”

“If Rhapsody manages to change into an older body then it will not be a daycare.” Gabriel chimed from the side.

“...SHE WILL STILL BE A BRAT ON THE INSIDE!” Billy grumbled and screamed his lungs out.

Would she? Her mind seemed to reflect her body, and it was more in synch than he was with his own body. The wonders of a naturally created Core.

“Leave, SuperForce is about to arrive.” He ended the discussion among his subordinates and sent them away, for he would deal with a SuperHero. He didn’t believe it would devolve into a fight. SuperForce was too much of an....honest person.

So long he wasn’t actively doing Evil, then he would be fine... Probably for the better to disassemble the weapons he had on his body...

Then after waiting for a few minutes, a knock on his door arrived, it was even and measured, each with the same strength and cadence. “Enter.” So he prepared himself.

And sure enough, it was the SuperHero, “Vulcanus.” The man was a cliché of an American hero, with a billowing cape at his back, his face wasn’t covered, and more importantly. His body thrummed with energy, as if he was ready to fight everyone on this base.

And he probably was.

“SuperForce.” So he answered in kind, and only in kind. Unlike him, he didn’t want to fight him that much, he would win nothing from it. But his body still was ready to react. The Wonders of a Machine Body.

“I was told you had information on the kidnapped girl. Was it one of yours?” SuperForce asked promptly, nothing else was said. Straight to business.

“We didn’t kidnap her nor restrain her.” He answered, this only made SuperForce frown, “Then do you know where she is? I would like to think you still have some humanity in that carcass Edward, but...Even while knowing who you were I will still fight you if needed.”

“Edward Black is dead.” He said with perhaps more emotion than needed, he felt already the complaint from his mechanical side. And the prompt from it asking if the emotions could be turned off. “Either way, it wasn’t to remember the past that I asked you to come.”

So he centered himself and focused on what mattered the most, get a checklist, prepare what you could, and answer what was easy. And do what you need.

“One of our orphanage programs got a new kid,” Set up the lie in the most natural form possible. “It was a girl with no parents or registration, a new core user to booth.”

“...where.” Superforce of course took the bait.

“So that you can pull her into the orphanage system? So she can be auctioned? Sold to a pharmaceutical? To the Saintsworths?” The mirth in his voice didn’t even need to be faked, he truly felt it. “If you are truly asking for it I will give you the address, and I will call in advance to tell her you are going for her. That a SuperHero will go and take her home.”

That, however, made SuperForce stop.

“What do you know?” Of course, he noticed it, the best way to tell a lie is to mix in the truth, the more nasty and hideous the truth, the better you can hide the lies.

“We think she was abused, at the very least she doesn’t know the meaning of Birthday or Parents.” A transcription of their interactions with Rhapsody was printed and he handed it to SuperForce. “Do you want me to call in Cerberus?”

“...that will not be needed.” SuperForce said, the man was still a softy, “...Will you take care of her?”

See? He knew it too well, what could happen if you take a young core user and give it to the system. And the horrors that could happen, he too, was one of those horrors, even if his monstrous side was hidden behind flashy heroics.

“Of course, we will not force her to do anything she doesn’t want to do.” So he answered with the truth here, the hell would freeze before he did to someone innocent what they did to him.

“And if she wants to join your minions?” SuperForce asked him with narrowed eyes.

“Then she better grow up fast. I will not field five-year-old midgets.” And he wouldn't, it wasn't his fault if Rhapsody could change her body age and mind age.

“You accepted Stella,” SuperForce said back at him. Was he still mad about that?

“We didn't send her against sidekicks. And she is fifteen. Let the girl do....” Oh.... Stella was fifteen.

He could....try that...no wait, was she fifteen? The last time he met her she was fifteen.

“She is eighteen, she just got her ID card. If you are poaching my daughter the least you could do was at least look over her.” Superforce grumbled at him.

It was almost as if they had returned to better times, two newly awakened Core users looking at the world with bright eyes. Hopeful for a great future full of adventures.

“We don't give preferential treatment, “he could even feel his face make a smile, of course, it wasn't like most could perceive his face anymore.

“You need to work on your poker face. Even as a machine I can still see through it.” It almost made him sad...

Almost.

[Confirmed status of Guilt.dll: Offline.]

“Fine, you got me. Want me to call her over?” Not feeling guilt had done wonders for his career.

Or at least making sure of when he could feel it.

“...no. we are keeping it professional, she can work as whatever she wants. But the moment I catch her... she must work as my sidekick.” SuperForce smiled at him, “Can you.... Send her my way?”

“Hah!” It was funny, he could almost forget how much he would have regretted lying to his best friend's face before he became Vulcanus. “Sorry, but she is free to make her own choices and can decide which missions she joins... best I can do is assign her to the new minions.”

“Hoh...any promising one?” SuperForce asked, it was mostly him being polite of course.

“A couple yes. One of them may even rise to our power level if you can believe it.” But of course, he would need to groom her well. If they could mold Rhapsody well enough....

She may be the answer to his problems.... He may even manage to steal the motherlode saved in the depths of this city.

“I will keep my eyes open to this superstar minion then.” Not like Superforce would do such a thing. He liked to be an example to Core users.

That was why he was his best friend... that was why he was his nemesis. That was why he would regret the day he had to kill him...

Unless he turned off his humanity that is. In which case that would be Friday. Murdering one's best friend is best done when you have the weekend to regret it.

