

## The Last Interrogation by Dakota Li

“Name.”

“Jane Doe.”

The current acting interrogator sighed in frustration, running a hand through their crew cut hair. In the mirror behind them there was a hiss as the air lock released. A door revealed itself in the wall.

There was a sharp clicking of high heels, the interrogator left, as a woman walked through the door, the section of mirrored wall returning to its sealed state moments later.

The room was cold and metallic. Under the fluorescent lighting, the woman’s pristine white lab coat looked no brighter than her dark hazelnut skin. A younger girl sat unmoving in a bolted down chair, hands neatly folded on the bolted down table of the interrogation room. She looked straight ahead, stone-faced, ignoring both the woman in the lab coat and the humanoid Casey Unit guard.

She had been this way for the last 46 minutes, since the Cybertronic Automated SENTRY she’d been ignoring dragged her in here. Thus far, attempts at interrogation gone nowhere. There wasn’t time for guards to waste hours attempting to get information out of this potential threat that just so happened to look like nothing more than a stubborn schoolgirl. Results were required now. The government official responsible for directing the entire facility, the bioengineer doctor whose codename was merely ‘X’ had to march all the way up from the deep labs just to clean up the security shit storm the *expensively* trained staff in her facilities were failing to fix.

X pulled a small metal box from a pocket in her lab coat, inserting it into a subcutaneous slot within the Casey Unit. The device beeped after a few moments. She unplugged it and read the display.

“The Casey Unit DNA Collector identifies you as one Diana Williams, age 15 years, born in Vindelata, Zeta District. Height, weight, school, family medical records... It’s all right here.”

X sat down at the table, across from Diana, placing the box on the table in front of her to show Diana the displayed picture of herself. Diana’s stoic facade cracked a bit, registering surprise.

“I will make this perfectly clear: our security team tried the friendly way, but this isn’t school detention and this does not end with your parent scolding you in the car ride home. The stakes here are paramount. You are going to tell me what I want to know Ms. Williams. I am offering you a final chance to be cooperative or...”

Diana said nothing. X sighed. Reaching into her lab coat, she pulled out a syringe and a vial full of a transparent orange liquid. Diana eyed the items.

“...is that truth serum?”

“Pentothal? Not quite. This is a modified barbiturate drug of my own design. But detailing the compound would only imperil you further.”

“For a supposed *government* medical research program, there are some awfully illegal things here.... and not just the drugs.”

“STARS is the Software, Technologies, Academics, and Remedies Society. It seems fitting that’d we’d be studying and reviewing programs, machinery, scientific advancements and drugs all at once.”

“Clearly, the government’s ‘clever acronyms’ program funds were not wasted”

X ignored the quip.

“First question: What were you doing in the labs.”

“I got lost on a school tour.”

“There are no tours scheduled for today, and our surveillance cameras show you wandering near the deep labs. I’m not an idiot, Diana.”

“What a relief. I needed to get the attention of someone competent.”

“You broke into a high security government lab for... attention?”

“I didn’t break in, I walked in the front door.”

“Good, that’s my second question: How did you get in here?”

“I have a director’s all access key.”

“Bullshit, I’m the only one here with one. How the hell did you get in here?”

“I told you, but it isn’t important. It doesn’t matter how I got in here.”

“Something is more important than a breach of top-of-the-line 23rd century government high security systems?”

“I have sensitive information about the Keta Corporation.”

X paused.

The Keta Corporation was founded a mere thirty years ago, but in that time had rose to great prominence in the world. The founder, idealistic genius Kestle King, had started his corporation with prize money from the Turing test competition and the two Grand Loebner prizes. Their program, KETA, broke boundaries in human-like A.I. behavior and revolutionized textual, visual and auditory input processing. Kestle King, working closely with STARS, made a fortune on two blockbusters: infinitely clean ‘Delea’ energy cells, and the sentient mechanical ‘Mekan Droids’.

Following the unsolved murder of Kestle King, innovation did not cease. In fact, soon the corporation’s technology dominated many industries. Delea batteries could be found powering everything, including the floating aerial city of Vindelata. The corporation expanded into pharmaceuticals, developing the cure-all, Pride, further modernizing everyday items, plans for more floating cities in the future. But the crowning achievement was the so-called “World Saving Device”, a machine credited for stopping all crime, natural disasters, etc. Yet, no one was quite sure how, save for a handful of terrified world leaders.

The corporation began to distance itself from STARS since Kestle’s passing, until the government was totally out of the loop. The government had little recourse. Closing or even just investigating the Keta corporation would likely require landing the city of Vindelata, where the Keta HQ and labs were. The potential environmental disasters that could be caused by

attempting to land a city-sized object from 10,000 feet made Keta literally outside of the reach of government.

STARS was forced to simply attempt to catch up to the corporation's technology through reverse engineering. The Casey Units, for example, were second-rate copies Keta's more elegant 'Biomeks.' Any information about the Keta Corporation, therefore, could be vital.

"The four CEOs running the branches of Keta Corporation, are just puppets. The corporation may be creating 'revolutionary innovations and products for a greater utopian world' as their slogan says, but that isn't their mastermind's goal."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the Keta corporation, the group which the world is now mostly if not totally dependent on, isn't trying to better the world and hasn't been for a while. The corporation's puppet master is a remorseless nihilistic monster of a woman whose hatred of humanity is genocidal. She wants to cause the apocalypse, and has been laying traps in the world for years now."

"Well, while that could definitely be an issue. Do you have proof for any of this?"

"I..." Diana looked forlornly at the table. "...I don't."

"How do you know any of this, then?"

"I was told about all of this by the mastermind herself. Right before she triggered the end of the world."

X shook her head. "Diana, this facility may seem isolated but we aren't oblivious. There is very much still a world out there. If this was all just an act to get some attent-"

"What time is it?"

"Excuse me?"

"What time is it?"

X raised her arm to check her watch. "Fifteen thirty-six hours."

"It's too late then, the world ends at 3:38 pm today." Diana stood, getting out of her chair. The Casey Unit next to her moved to apprehend her. She turned, looking straight into its optical sensors. "Override key: TALOS 436- Command: Stop."

The Casey Unit stopped in its tracks, while X gaped.

Diana continued addressing the Casey Unit, "I know that you're a mechanical being capable of rational thought, so listen to what I'm saying. Your protocol is to protect this facility, more specifically the facility's director, correct?"

The Casey Unit nodded.

"You and all other Biomeks are going to blow up in about a minute, so please do us a favor and turn this table into a blast wall. Quickly."

The Casey Unit registered the information it had just received, and moved to grab the table. Sirens began to sound outside the room. The Casey Unit effortlessly ripped the table out from its bolts on the floor and turned the square table on its side, bending part of the surface at an angle to create an impromptu blast wall. The Casey Unit pushed the cover against a wall, then walked to the furthest corner from that spot as it could.

Diana grabbed X by the arm, pulling her down behind the repurposed table. She practically ripped X's lab coat off, holding it above them both in their crouched position. "Take a deep breathe." Diana inhaled deeply, holding her breath. Before X could say anything, the Casey Unit began to emit an eerie whine from within its metallic-silicon body. A second later, the Casey Unit detonated.

The blast wall was driven further into the wall by the explosion, fire filled the room momentarily, until all of the oxygen in the sealed room was used up. The mirrored glass on the walls shattered and shards rained down on X's lab coat, which Diana clung to as the room shook apart around them. X was rendered temporarily deaf and could only hear the endless ringing of her eardrums.

The emergency fire extinguishing system turned on, filling the room with a layer of suppressive foam. Fans then clicked on automatically, starting to vent out the smoke and let safe air in from an emergency tank.

X gingerly crawled out from behind the table to survey the wreckage around her. The room was still shaking. What little was left of the now destroyed Casey Unit was partially embedded in the reinforced bullet proof table that had saved them. X shut her eyes, overwhelmed by the realization that although she was fine, countless others weren't. Casey Units were ubiquitous throughout this facility, and Biomeks were commonplace across the globe. People used them as personal assistants, school teachers, nurses... X gripped the table harder, opening her eyes to look at Diana. She pulled off her sunglasses, shooting the girl an enraged glare.

"How did you know that was going to happen!?"

"Because it's all happened before." Diana was sadly pawing at the remains of the Casey unit in the table, murmuring a quiet thank you.

"Explain. Now."

"The mastermind told me everything when I went to confront her, how she killed Kestle years ago, how she planned to end the world, everything. This is just the beginning, and it gets worse from here. Vindelata is going to fall, and the impact will be devastating. Any survivors from this and the next incident are going to be at a loss for recreating society, as the Pride drug contains an infertility agent that's going to get activated as well."

X could only stammer, "Why?"

"The mastermind isn't human. She's something beyond us but hates us all the same. I'm trying to stop her regardless." Diana reached into her shirt, pulling out a small device with a big red button.

"What is-"

"The World Saving Device."

X just looked at it wide eyed. "What does it-"

"It's a time machine." Diana prepared herself to go, but gave X a last good bye.

"Well, wish me luck on my next try. Thanks for the access key again."

X patted her pocket, but Diana waved the key that X was trying to find as the world melted away once more.