

The docking bay was quiet. Not a sound could be heard throughout the station. The small military outpost was completely void of life...save for one unfortunate soul.

He cowered behind one of the weapon crates that was set to be shipped out that day. He leaned out a bit to take a look at the surrounding area. The bay was drenched in pools of blood and mangled corpses. The scene looked like something out of a war movie. But unfortunately for the soldier, it wasn't one.

He had gotten a call from some of the men working in the labs that something had gone wrong. But the soldier wasn't able to ask what had happened, as screams of terror cut the conversation short. Soon afterward, alarms went off across the base. The soldier had rushed to the labs to aid in the issue, but when he got there, a gruesome scene was all that was left. Not wanting to share the same fate, he made a mad dash to the docking bay. Unfortunately, whatever was hunting them must have known someone would try to escape, as not long after he got there one of the pilots let out a rather loud scream, and the bloodbath started once more.

He had been able to hide long enough for things to quiet down. He slowly crept out from behind the crate, and started to inch his way to one of the cargo ships. He clutched his plasma rifle close to his chest, his finger ready to pull the trigger at the drop of a hat. Once he left the station, he could call for backup and let them handle the rest. He would probably get a rather long scolding from the higher ups, but anything would be better than ending up as one of the bodies that now populated the base.

He slowly crept onto the walkway leading to the docked ship. He was almost free! Once he was in the ship, he would be safe. A quivering smile crossed his face at the thought of finally escaping this nightmare. But as soon as he reached the stairs leading to the cockpit, he heard a faint growl echo throughout the docks.

"Shit!" he yelled as he dashed up the stairs. A loud roar broke the rather somber silence as he heard something begin to run towards him. He reached the ship and frantically pushed the open door button. The sounds of the monster grew closer and closer. He looked back to see a black beast running at him. Now in a panic, the soldier turned towards the door and squeezed into the crack. He ran to the cockpit and slammed the close door button. He then activated the thrusters and slammed the gas as hard as he could. The sudden burst sent the ship rocketing out of the dock. The soldier was flung out of his seat as the ship zoomed out of the bay and into space. Shaken, the soldier slowly got up and sat down.

"So that's why they always say to send her out nice and easy..." he said as he chuckled a bit. He let out a sigh of relief. He was finally free of that nightmare.

The soldier stood back up and made his way to the storage room. After all he had been through, he was left exhausted and hungry. Some rations and water from the fridge would help

him feel right as rain. He entered the code to open the door. It slid open with a faint swish, to reveal the black beast staring straight at him; its eyes glowing a bright yellow.

The soldier's eyes widened.

"FUCK!" Was the only word that escaped his lips as the beast pounced on him...

"If you are willing to hear us out Ms.Colbert, we at Outreach might have a job that would be perfect for you!"

"Its...Dr. Colbert. Amelia Colbert..."

The two military men chuckled. They were dressed in standard business suits, but you could tell they had never worn one before as the suits they had on were clearly too small. Both donned the standard crew cuts, chiseled jawline, and jacked torsos you would assume a stereotypical brute would have. They looked so generic you could hardly tell them apart, save for their tie and suit colors.

The one on the left spoke. He had a red tie and dark blue suit. "Yes, Dr.Colbert. We could use your services. We have been working on a rather special project and we think you would be the perfect one to help us bring it to life."

The one on the right nodded. He had a blue tie with a dark grey suit. "Indeed. We hear you're the best when it comes to nano-tech. When we were asked to find someone who was skilled in the subject matter, you were the first that came to mind!"

"Yeah, though probably more for the price rather than the skill," Amelia thought to herself. She knew they only came to her because she was on the verge of losing her job. Monilo-Tech had been struggling financially ever since their competitor discovered a new species on one of their planets they had been preparing for colonization. The lifeform's unique biology opened up a treasure-trove of new breakthroughs in bioengineering, and it was making many of Monilo-tech's cybernetics obsolete. With drugs and procedures that could make someone as strong as fifty men, or able to survive in any environment, stuff like the performance enhancing nanites Amelia made were not enough. Now with finances being rather short, Monilo-Tech was laying off people every day, and Amelia knew her time was coming up any day now. She was in desperate need of a new job, and these military types knew she would probably settle for anything they gave her.

"What is it you need my help for?" Amelia asked reluctantly.

The one with the blue tie spoke. "Well, we have started work on some nanites that will be used in the cataloging of DNA. The idea is we drop 'em on a planet and let them go around collecting samples from the local wildlife. The DNA gathered would be used for many things, like knowing what the environment of a planet is like before even setting foot on it. Or locating spots that would be good for habitation. Or-"

"Gathering samples for use in bioengineering?" Amelia said as she raised an eyebrow.

"Uh....Yeah..." The one with the blue tie said quietly, as an awkward air filled the room. "Well, anyway, we could really use your help making a device that would be able to control them all remotely. Our computers aren't able to handle controlling billions of nanites at once, so we figured someone who knows how they work might be able to come up with something that can."

"Yeah, that shouldn't be too hard to do. A hivemind like AI could be used to do the job," Amelia said as she thought about all the possible ways it could work. She wondered why they needed her to do the job. While controlling that many nanites with one computer would be quite difficult, a military faction like them should have had the resources to develop something on their own. The hivemind AI had been used in the past, though with smaller amounts of nanites. Still, It was odd.

"Is there anything special about these nanites that I should be aware of?" Amelia asked rather skeptically. The two men fidgeted a bit before replying.

"Well...it's kinda on a need to know basis. All we can say is there is some experimental tech that is being used, and we need someone with the right specs for the job," the one with the red tie replied.

The look on his face showed that there was definitely something shady going on with the project. "I should probably walk away right now," She thought to herself. "But...I need a job. If I say no, I'm probably done for." Bioengineering was killing the nanite business, and Amelia doubted she would be able to get a job in the field now. But if this project did well though, it could let her make a name for herself and nanites once more.

"I think I can do this for you then," she said with a faint smile. "How much would this job pay?" she asked.

The two men looked at each other. Then, the one with the blue tie spoke.

"Well, you see....."

“That should do it!” Amelia said as she finished typing up the last of the commands into her computer. It had been three months since the two men offered her the job. They had taken her to the Outreach military outpost in orbit around Saturn, and put her straight to work in one of their research labs. It was small and barren, with only the bare necessities needed for the job. The lab was lit using fluorescent lights that cloaked everything in a sterile yellow glow. Yet despite this, the lab was still dark and murky as half the lights didn’t even turn on. It was apparent from day one that the faction she was working for didn’t want to spend any more money on her than they needed, and considering what little they paid her, that was saying something.

They had given her a couple capsules filled with nanites, but told her not to open them under any means. She had protested to this, saying that only being able to work on them remotely would make the job ten times harder. However, they wouldn’t budge on the matter, saying their computers had everything she would need.

While that was technically true, coding the control program was still a huge pain. Amelia found that she was locked out of many of the nanites functions. She was given a vague explanation of what the nanites could do, and how they should react to commands, but it left a lot to the imagination. As far as she gathered, the nanites had some polymorphic capabilities, and some higher level of interaction with organic matter. It was experimental technology that would allow for the line between organic and cybernetic systems to blend considerably. While the many applications this new tech could have was astounding, it was odd seeing it used in nanites, especially ones that were to be used to just gather DNA.

“With this operating system, it should be fairly easy to link up an AI to run them all. I just need to install it into the nanites and then the biggest hurdle will be done,” she said as she started the wireless download. Her computer sent out a signal to the nanite capsules on the counter, linking them. The capsules began to shake a bit as the nanites inside activated. The installation started, and slowly the code was uploaded straight into each and every nanite.

“Finally!” Amelia said as she slumped over her computer. She had been working for three days straight coding that operating system. Her hair was a frizzy mess, and she was in desperate need of some sleep. But she still had one more thing left to do before she could rest. Across the room was a small plastic box with an apple inside. She needed to test the nanites code before she could move on. The men in charge were very much opposed to this of course. With how much she was kept from with this project, it would make sense letting her see how they worked would be the last thing they wanted. However, after much convincing, they had given her a capsule of prototype nanites to use as a test. They had said the tech in the prototype was very much out of date, but would still give her a good indication of how the real ones would function. While she would have contested that a drastic change in hardware could mess with the code, she knew this was the best option she was gonna get.

A beep came from her computer, letting Amelia know the installation was done. She walked over to the collection of capsules on the counter. Most of the capsules were pitch black, making her workspace look like it was engulfed by a dozen tiny black holes. However, one was translucent. The nanites inside sat at the bottom, like a small mass of metallic sand. Amelia grabbed it and gave it a look over. She wondered why the military faction had chose to use these capsules to contain the nanites. It didn't seem to make much sense, as a more standard containment unit would have been much more efficient. But she decided not to question it. She walked over to her computer and entered in a few commands. The capsule she held shook a bit as the nanites inside began to swirl around. All she had to do was put the capsule into the plastic box, turn it on, and monitor the data she got from it to make sure it worked. She input the final command, and turned towards the back side of the room. She looked at the capsule in her hand one more time. Seeing the nanites inside swirl around was almost mesmerizing. She gazed at it for a bit.

"If this works, I'll be set! Everyone will want a piece of this. Just think of all the good this could-"

A loud buzz cut her off mid sentence. She turned to her computer to see a red warning flashing. In big bold letters, the words "Hardware malfunction" ran across the screen.

"That can't be goo-"

POP

She turned forward, just as a swarm of nanites came rushing at her. She jumped back as they swirled around her. She only had a second to process what had happened, as before she could hit the kill switch on her computer, the nanites dove at her. They flew into her mouth and nose, and coated her skin. As they did so, she felt an odd sensation. She expected the nanites to pierce her body, as a means to gather DNA. But instead, they felt almost like a liquid. They flowed on top of her skin and inside her lungs. Then she felt a strange tingle as the nanites began to almost flow INTO her flesh. She watched as slowly the cloud that surrounded her dissipated inside herself.

"That was odd..." she said, confused by what had just transpired. However, her confusion soon turned to fear as her hand began to shake. She looked down to see that it was bubbling, like if something was moving underneath her skin. Then, her hand jerked, her fingers bending in unnatural ways as she felt them grow stiff. Her digits began to bloat, as they extended out and turned metallic in texture. She swung her head to her other hand as she noticed it too was changing in a similar way!

The discoloration began to move itself up her arms. As it did, she felt her muscles and bones disintegrate. They were being broken down into....nanites! They were becoming nanites! It all began to come together for Amelia. The hush-hush by the military personal, the

biomechanical elements, the fact they wanted to get someone to work on it for them! What they were working on, whatever it was, wasn't gathering DNA. It was assimilating it.

The nanites continued to eat away at Amelia. She could feel them, like they were a part of her. The flesh and bone inside her now cybernetic arms was being broken down, turned into nanites, and reassembled as robotic parts. She could feel blood vessels becoming wires, muscle turning synthetic, bones becoming metal beam, and skin turning to plating.

She looked down as the tingling spread to her legs. Like her hands and arms, her feet bubbled, bent, and warped as they too were assimilated. Her feet elongated as her toes pushed out and became sharp, while her legs started to become thicker. The change in stance made her arch over, as she realized she wasn't going to be biped for much longer. Her shoulders and hips started to push out, growing into long, pointed segments. The tingling moved towards the tip of her spine, as she felt a long growth push out from her bottom and out. The tail she had just sprouted, as well as the increased size of her limbs was doing a number on her clothes, as she found that they began to rip and tear.

Her arms and legs now looked completely robotic. Black and red plating covered them, and her fingers and toes had become claws. She felt the tingling continue into her torso, as the last of her clothes ripped apart and fell to the floor. Her breasts began to be sucked into her body, as her midsection segmented and became a shining silver. Her chest began to warp and barrel out, as it too became covered in a black plating. She finally fell over onto all fours as the transformation began to spread up her neck. She felt her head push forward as her neck grew longer. Their task almost complete, the nanites started to reconfigure her mind. Her vision slowly became dark as she felt system code seep into her brain. As the operating system took over, her hair was eaten by the nanites, and her ears grew out into long, black spikes. Her nose pushed forward into a muzzle, and her eyes began to glow yellow. As her consciousness faded, the last of her changes finished, leaving a dog-like robot in her place.

For a while, it stood there, motionless. Inside its now cybernetic mind, it began formatting itself to use its new body.

"...ANALYZING BODY STRUCTURE...DIGITIGRADE BODY TYPE FOUND.
ADAPTING LOCOMOTION METHOD"

"SEARCHING FOR COMMAND AI NETWORK....NONE FOUND. SEARCHING
THROUGH MEMORY...ONE AI FOUND. IDENTIFIED AS AMELIA VELSA COLBERT.
SETTING AS COMMAND AI"

"SEARCHING FOR DIRECTIVE...DIRECTIVE FOUND. PANDORA UNIT
(POLYMORPHIC, ASSIMILATING, NANITE-DRONE, ORDERED, RENEGADE, ANDROID) IS
A-CLASS SEARCH AND DESTROY MODEL. IDENTIFYING TARGET..."

“MEMORY DATA OF COMMAND AI SHOWS HOSTILITY TOWARDS MILITARY FACTION OUTREACH. SETTING AS TARGET. MISSION, ELIMINATE ALL HOSTILES...”

The drone turned its head towards the door. Unlike the human it once was, its hearing was fine tuned to pick up even the faintest sound. Outside, it heard two guards talking.

“IDENTIFYING LIFEFORMS...LIFEFORMS IDENTIFIED AS HUMANS. AI MEMORY INDICATES HUMANS ARE FROM THE MILITARY FACTION OUTREACH . ENGAGING IN ATTACK...”

The drone, now with a mission, dashed towards the door, crashing through it, sending the guards and various pieces of door flying. The guards crashed against the far wall, before sliding down on their bottoms.

“What the hell was tha-” one said, or tried to say, before the drone pounced on him and began ripping him to pieces. The other guard, snapped to his senses by the sound of his comrade’s screams, quickly got up and ran to the communication panel at the end of the hall.

“This is Private Jones! There has been some sort of accident! Something has gone terribly wrong! Requesting back up right away! We need.....AUGGHHHHGGHHHHGH!!!!.....

The ship was quiet. Where the soldier and drone once stood was a corpse and a human female, bare nude, passed out on the floor. The sound of a small meteorite hitting the hull of the ship awoke the human from her daze. She lifted her head and held it with her hand. Her senses were going crazy. It felt like she was processing a lifetime’s worth of information all at once. She concentrated, and tried to piece together what it was that had happened. She thought back to the last thing she could remember.

“I was in the lab....working on the nanites...And then....They attacked?....And I....!” she paused as she remembered how she had transformed into that....robot. She opened her eyes and looked around. She was in a ship of some kind. She then realized that not only was the room she was in covered in blood and guts, but so was she. She turned to see what remained of the soldier head staring at her. Then it all came back to her. The massacre that occurred on that base.

“Oh fuck....What have I become...?” She said to herself as she tried to understand it all. She had become that robot dog thing... and killed everyone. Everyone save for one guy. Whom she had chased onto this ship and THEN killed. And now, after all this carnage, she was somehow herself again.

“ I HAVE GIVEN BACK CONTROL COMMAND AI AMELIA VESLA COLBERT FOR THE TIME BEING”

“Who said that?!?” Amelia said as she looked around the ship. Then she remembered that, while the robot was in control, it called upon her memories to figure out its “mission”.

“Are you... the robot thing?” she asked rather timidly.

“PANDORA UNIT IS IDENTIFIED AS CLASS A SEARCH AND DESTROY MODEL,” it responded back to her. Its voice was cold and robotic, though it seemed like it also was trying to emulate a human accent. The resulting babble sounded odd, but it fit the emotionless, killing machine she was just a few hours before.

“Hmmm... so you don’t have a name...”

“PANDORA UNIT IS IDENTIFIED AS CLASS A SEARCH AND DESTROY MODEL ”

“Hmmm...I’ll just call you Seeker then,” Amelia didn’t know why she even cared to give the thing a name. Maybe because it was a part of her now, and she didn’t want to think that she was now half-nameless killing machine. If it had a name, then it wasn’t as bad...it was still VERY bad, but not as bad. She chuckled a bit, amused by how well she was taking everything that had just happened. She was probably in shock. She feared what might happen when the guilt and fear finally set in, but right now she had to focus on the issue at hand.

“PANDORA UNIT IS NOW IDENTIFIED AS SEEKER BY COMMAND AI AMELIA VESLA COLBERT”

“Just call me Amelia.”

“COMMAND AI IS NOW IDENTIFIED AS AMELIA”

“So...what to do now?” She thought to herself. She was human again...but for how long? Seeker had just murdered an entire military outpost, and she was now in one of their ships, heading god knows where. They must have sent out a distress signal, so it would only be a matter of time before they found out what happened and came looking for her. When they did find her, what were they going to do? What was SHE going to do.

“MISSION IS TO ELIMINATE ALL HOSTILES,” Seeker said breaking the silence.

“Hostiles...You mean the military faction?”

“AFFIRMATIVE”

“Uh...Cancel mission!” She said firmly. She was the command AI after all, so Seeker would have to do what she said.

“AFFIRMATIVE. MISSION CANCELED.”

“Good. No more killing,” Amelia said with a sigh of relief. That was one problem solved.

“SEEKER DETECTS THAT AMELIA STILL READS AS BEING THREATENED. WHY DID AMELIA CANCEL MISSION IF AMELIA IS STILL IN DANGER.”

“Jeez...” Amelia said in an annoyed tone. She knew it couldn’t have been that easy. “I don’t want to kill anyone else.” She said with a huff.

“SEEKER CALCULATES THAT AMELIA AND SEEKER WILL MOST LIKELY BE TERMINATED IF MISSION IS NOT COMPLETED. DOES AMELIA WISH TO BE TERMINATED?”

“No...I don’t wish to be terminated. And if I did, you would know because you are in my head,” She quipped. “I thought I programmed you to be smarter than this.”

“SEEKER IS ONLY CONFIRMING COMMANDS WITH COMMAND AI AMELIA. IF COMMAND AI AMELIA DOES NOT WISH TO BE TERMINATED, SHOULD SEEKER CONTINUE WITH MISSION?”

“No! I don’t want anyone else to die!”

“SEEKER CALCULATES THAT AMELIA AND SEEKER WILL MOST LIKELY BE TERMINATED IF MISSION IS NOT COMPLETED. IF AMELIA DOES NOT WANT MISSION TO BE COMPLETED, BUT DOES NOT WANT TO BE TERMINATED, THEN WHAT DOES AMELIA COMMAND SEEKER TO DO?”

“I...I don’t know,” Amelia grabbed her head as she tried to think. She didn’t want to hurt anyone else, but Seeker was right. If she didn’t do something, the military faction would most likely kill her. She REALLY didn’t want to hurt anyone else, but she didn’t want to die either.

“Seeker....I have a new mission for you. Set mission to Protect command AI Amelia and Seeker...Also set mission to only use lethal force if necessary...”

“AFFIRMATIVE. SEEKER HAS ACCEPTED NEW MISSION”

“Ok. Now we just need to find a place to hide out and figure out our game plan...we are on this ship. Maybe we can find a nearby station. One that is low key; like maybe one of those shady market hubs in the asteroid belt. It would be dangerous, but we would probably be able to avoid Outreach for a good while. It's better than nothing,” she said with a bit of uncertainty in her voice. “You with me Seeker?”

“SEEKER COMPLIES WITH COMMAND AI'S PLAN.”

“All right then.” Amelia said as she got up and walked to the cockpit. She sat in the captain's chair, and opened up the holo map. As she looked for a place to land, she thought to herself.

“Well...what a nightmare this job turned out to be...but i guess I was right about one thing. Everyone is gonna want a piece of me...pieces of me...They are gonna want me in pieces,” she thought to herself. She paused for what felt like a lifetime.

“Well...at least I don't have to worry about finding a job now.”