

Origin of Arcania

End of Arcanon

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Cayla sits at the desk, reviewing some notes from the nano-genetics group. Having just been promoted, she now oversees the cryogenics group, and is awaiting the replacements for the four staff members that are being transferred out.

A woman walks over and sets a tablet on the desk, "I've finished my last round." Cayla looks up to see Maria, an older, grey haired woman give her a mock salute. "I'm off to my transport," she states.

"Have a safe trip," Cayla calls back.

"Be nice to the rookies!" Maria laughs, as the doors close behind her.

Now alone in the room, the twenty four year old sighs, and goes back to her reading, brushing up on the nano-genetics group's recent work. They've finally started working with the one mammal native to Arcania, the Moku. For the most part, the things look like an opossum lizard, with tufts of fur growing up between their scales.

Hearing the doors open, Cayla looks up to see two young men standing in it, looking lost. "Can I help you?" she asks, already knowing the answer.

The taller one steps forward, "I'm John Dewas, intern from the Andolina Neurological Academy."

Unable to hide his nervousness, the other slowly steps in. "Uhm...I'm Dan, Dan Greys, intern, Fleet Medical Academy."

Cayla sets two tablets on the counter, "If you'll just verify your identity..." Both men put their right hands on the tablets, which quickly turn green. "...I'll want you both to report here at seventeen hundred hours, that's four PM local time-remember that you're on a twenty six hour clock here. For now though, go get your stuff settled in your rooms."

They both nod, and John says, "Yes ma'am."

Dan, however, says, "Yes sir."

Cayla looks up at him, "Dan, do I look like a 'sir' to you?"

Taken off guard, he stutters, "I'm in the service, everyone's a sir."

She nods, "But I'm not in Fleet Service. So what should you call me?"

He nervously looks between John and Cayla, but getting no help, he asks, "Ma'am?"

"Thank you." Cayla sits back down as they head out the door.

As the doors close, John says, "That was a lousy impression."

Dan glances nervously up at John as they walk down the corridor towards the living quarters. "Easy for you to say, you're not the one who insulted her."

John chuckles and pats him on the shoulder, "Tell me, how did you ever get into Fleet Service anyway?"

With a sigh, Dan pushes open his room's door, "Runs in the family."

John shakes his head, still chuckling, and enters his own room, just down the hall.

Standing behind the desk, Cayla arranges a few items on the counter as she waits. John walks in first and looks at the counter.

"What's all this?" he asks.

"Your signets. Where's Dan?"

The door suddenly opens again and he steps into the room, "I'm here, stopped on the wrong floor."

"Until you're used to the layout, let your AI guide you. There are places in this facility that I haven't been yet either."

"How long have you been here?" John asks.

"Five years." She slides a pair of signets over to them. "These will allow you access to most of the facility."

John looks curiously at the signet, "What's this symbol mean?"

"Let me show you." Cayla steps out from behind the desk and over to the first door on her left. "This is where we keep our Alpha." She opens the door and steps inside. They guys follow and stop just inside the door.

"What is this?" John asks as Dan stands in awe.

"This is where most of our knowledge of cryo-suspension came from. This subject was found, just like this, sometime before the Gene War. Since then, the science and medical communities have studied them thoroughly. They've been reverse engineered, and we've still not reached the complexity of the systems used in these pods."

Dan looks curiously at the pod, then asks, "What do you mean?"

"Neither of them has an AI, or nanites. Near as we can tell, they ingested some sort of cryoprotectant before they were froze."

Dan puts his hands to the pod's window, then gasps, "There's no organ damage?"

"Nope, between the protectant and the yet-to-be-learned freezing process, they are still in perfect health."

John walks over and looks at the control panel, "Has anyone tried to wake them?"

"The pods are on a locked out countdown. If there's an override, no one's found it."

"What's this?" he asks, pointing to a display.

"That's the countdown. It's in a base twelve, and the symbols don't match anything we're aware of. The countdowns still have about two hundred, twenty two years left."

"There's another?" Dan asks.

"Yep, follow me." They step out of that room and into the next room to the right. "Meet Beta."

They step up to the window, and John asks, "What's with the ears?"

"And her legs?" Dan adds.

"And her tail?" Cayla adds, "She's a cat, or at least that's what her DNA says she is."

Dan points into the tube, "But her shape, she's...she's almost..."

"Human?" she finishes for him. "Yeah, that one we don't quite understand yet either." She then points to the top of the cryo-tube. "Near as we can tell, this is the symbol belonging to the pods' manufacturer, something else we've yet to identify."

She leads them back out into the main room. "I know you boys have plenty of questions right now, mostly about Beta. What I'm about to show you is a few months old, but it may answer some of those questions." She turns and gestures to a large screen, currently showing a mountain, at the far end of the room. "Have a seat."

As Cayla has a seat back at her desk, Dan and John quickly sit where they can easily see the screen. The mountain suddenly livens up with a simulated aerial pass. Following a eastward direction, it quickly zooms in on a village. As the village fills, and over fills the screen, a number of people can be seen walking around.

"They're not human," John mutters, noticing their abnormal walk. He then gasps, "They're cats?"

As the screen takes a tour of the village, a voice starts to narrate. "This is the village of Pridewyn, currently there are over four hundred felines living here. They are the first of the evolved, meaning, their DNA was put through a rapid evolution process."

"Using nanites, the geneticists rewrote the DNA of common predatory cats from Earth, altering their form to more closely resemble humans. They were also able to increase some attributes, bringing them up to human level."

The screen suddenly pans out, and then zooms in on a second village. "This is Arroket, home of the canines." After a few moments, the screen zooms back out, to a straight overhead view showing all nine of the villages. They start to get highlighted, in a clockwise direction as the narrator continues, "Arindell, the home of the deer. Dendros, the home of squirrels and their cousins. Three Lands, home to otters, minks, weasels and their cousins. Burrowfield, the home of the mice, rats and other rodents. Lanketh, the home of rabbits and hares."

The next dot shows up between the others, offset to the south, "Lorholt, the home of skunks, raccoons and red pandas." The screen suddenly zooms on a point centered north of Lorholt, "Finally, here were building Garrent. This will be the home of the Moku. They are the only native mammal of this planet."

The map suddenly zooms out, showing the facility's mountain to the left, a second mountain range to the right, and an ocean-like lake to the north.

Dan looks at John for a moment, then turns to Cayla, "Is this even legal? I mean, with the planetary protection acts and such?"

"When this planet was first evaluated, it's ecosystem was in collapse," she explains. "You see, there are two really big, super predators here. One's called a karnesh, it'll eat anything other creature that it comes across. The other is a der'ock, it flies around at night and also tries to eat anything it finds."

"Both these predators have nothing that hunt them, not even the other, the karnesh can't reach where the der'ock nests, and the der'ock can't get through the karnesh's armor, hell, some of our weapons don't even get through its armor."

“Anyway, we imported many thousands of different species of insects, reptiles, aquatic, and plant life, from Earth and a few other places, in an attempt to stabilize the ecosystem. It took a few hundred years, but we managed to catch the collapse. Currently it’s reversing, and we’re culling the der’ock and karnesh, helping the recovery.”

“So there’s no sentients native to this planet?” John asks.

“None that anyone could find. There are several territorial raptor like creatures far to the east, but none around the villages.”

The guys sit in silence for a few minutes. It’s been one of humanity’s biggest desires since the dawn of space travel over a thousand years ago, finding other sentient life to interact with.

John sighs, and asks, “So, we’re making intelligent life?”

“Yep.”

Dan looks back at Cayla, “Is that legal?”

“I’ve been told that it is, other than that, I haven’t found any laws about it.”

John pokes at Dan, “I don’t think our academies would be sending us here for our internship if it was doing illegal stuff.”

Dan just sighs heavily, and leans on the back of the chair. John looks back at Cayla, “So, what do we actually do around here?”

Cayla smiles and waves them over, “We, get to spend most of our time, critiquing the finished projects from the engineering groups.”

They both quickly walk over to her as she starts showing them how to access the projects up for review listings.

* * *

John sits at the desk, looking through the list of projects while Cayla does a daily diagnostic on Alpha’s cryo-tube. She glances out at him and smiles slightly. He’s adjusted to this planet rather quickly.

At that moment, Dan comes through the outer door looking like he just woke up. John looks up at him, “Just woke up?”

Dan sighs and flops into the closest chair, “Never really got to sleep.”

“Why?” Cayla asks as she heads to Beta’s cryo pod to run it’s diagnostic.

“I tried a sedative, but...I don’t know. Something’s wrong with my room. I just can’t get comfortable to sleep.”

John smiles, but doesn’t say anything, so Cayla asks, “How’d you sleep on the transport?”

“Great, why?”

“What were you on before that?”

“Academy training frigate.”

Cayla chuckles, “You need some background noise, like the ships have.”

He slumps in the chair, “Thank you. I can’t believe that I didn’t figure that out.”

John chuckles now, “You’re exhausted, can’t think...”

He’s interrupted by the echo of a loud metallic clunk, followed with a whirring sound. “What’s that?” Dan asks.

“They’re opening the hanger doors,” Cayla calls.

“Why?”

John sits up suddenly, looking at the screen. "They're sending out an archeological team." He taps the screen a couple times, looking for more information, "The dig site's...past the eastern range. Looks like the satellites picked up some geometric structures."

Cayla comes out to the desk as Dan gets up. Both step over to look at the screen with John. After a few moments, Cayla sighs, "I'd love go out there some time. Do some camping, fishing...something."

John looks up at her, "Camping?"

She gives him a puzzled look, "Yeah, you know, tent, sleeping bag, cook over a fire?"

"I didn't know people still did that?"

"I haven't been since I got here, but used to go with my parents, couple times every year." The whirring sound returns as the doors close, concluding with a heavy thump.

John sighs, "It'll be nice to have something new to read as their reports come in on what they find."

Dan flops tiredly on a couch and groans, "We've only been here a week and you're already bored?"

John chuckles, "What can I say, I love to read."

* * *

Seeing Dan behind the desk as she enters, Cayla smiles at him, "You look awake this morning."

He blushes as he smiles back, "I feel awake too. Chris spent all night playing the background noise from the transport, and I slept like a log."

"Chris?"

"My AI."

"Ah, how old is she anyway?"

Dan give her a curious look, "*He*, is four. Got him when I joined the academy. Named him after a friend of mine who passed."

"What happened?"

"Transport he was on got attacked by pirates."

Cayla sighs, "You'd think that with the technology we have now days, people wouldn't be like that."

Dan slouches in the chair, "Some people are just mean."

The doors open suddenly and John comes in. "Did you hear? They caught one!"

Dan looks up at him, curiously, "Caught one what?"

"A karnesh. Can we go take a look?"

Cayla quickly steps over to the desk. "No, they don't like gawkers down in quarantine, but we can watch from here." The display changes to show a camera view of the outside quarantine area. In the middle of the yard, inside a heavily reinforced cage, paces a large scaled creature.

It's huge, nearly twice the height of a person, and longer than the twenty meter cargo containers sitting next to the cage. It has four legs, a thick, heavy tail, and a head similar to a snapping turtle.

Dan shakes his head in disbelief. “Look at its size, it could eat someone in a single bite.”

Cayla nods, “Now you know why we cull them. That thing could walk into a village and just start eating people, and nothing they could do would stop it.”

John looks up at her, “What are they going to do with it?”

“Study it for a couple days, then probably dispose of it.”

“How big is the other one, the der'ock?” Dan asks.

“Well, quarantine managed to catch one a few months ago. Marc?”

The screen changes to show a night view of a similar cage, the creature inside is about three quarters the size of the karnesh, and looks like a wyvern. Instead of pacing, it's trying to bite and climb the cage walls, desperately trying to find a way out.

“Why is it dark?” John asks.

“The der'ock is nocturnal, light bothers it, a lot.” Cayla nods back to the screen, “Watch.”

The feed skips ahead to early dawn. At first it seems to settle, like it's getting ready to sleep, but when it notices that it's getting brighter, it starts to panic, flapping its leathery wings wildly, and making all kinds of squawks and grunts. Dan seems to wince as it's panic escalates with the rising sun, Cayla sits and turns away, not wanting to watch.

About the time the sun starts to shine directly on it, the poor creature is flopping wildly in the cage, using it's head and tail to try to break out as several of the quarantine workers repeatedly try, and fail, to tranquilize it.

Wings now shredded, its few horns broken off, and mouth bloodied from trying to chew the cage apart, the creature suddenly collapses. Seeing how distressed it is, the workers start trying to open the cage, but they cannot. It's now deformed and the door won't budge. As several people show up with cutting tools, the bloodied, self battered beast lets out in one last gurgle. When the crew get inside the cage, they quickly realize that it's too late.

“The sun killed it?” Dan asks, obviously rattled by what he just watched.

Cayla turns back to them as the screen clears, “It had a heart attack. Panic induced.”

John shakes his head and slowly starts to wander around the room. Dan though, seems to want to cry, so Cayla adds, “They haven't tried to catch another since. I need to get some air.”

Cayla heads out the doors to the nearest lift. After getting out on the top floor, she heads to the observation room. This is one of the few rooms that regularly circulates air in from the outside with very little filtration, allowing people to smell the ‘great outdoors’ without actually being there.

Cayla has a seat at a corner table and orders a chamomile tea from the small pop up converter in the middle of the table. When it appears, she takes it and holds it in both hands, letting the heat from the cup comfort her.

The der'ock's suffering had been her fault. She'd spotted it one day while studying some caves between Three Lands and Lanketh. The biology team sent a containment crew to catch it, which they managed to do when it got dark.

If she'd just never found it, if she hadn't been looking through the caves using that drone.

“You’re not beating yourself up about that der’ock again are you?”

Cayla doesn’t need to look, she recognizes his voice, “Hello Dane.” He sits across from her as she continues. “You know me, put myself in a corner with chamomile, I’m feeling guilty of something.”

“Yes, but why you feel guilty about that creature is beyond me. Don’t you dare get me wrong, I feel bad that the creature died, but that was not something you could control. No one knew about their intense aversion to light.”

She sighs, unable to deny his logic. “I know, but it really doesn’t help.”

“Would it have made any difference if the troops just went out and culled it?”

“I dunno.”

“I think it would. If they’d just hunted it, you wouldn’t have known how it died.”

She looks down her tea, “Every time I see that video, I cant help but feel for what it went through.”

Dane puts his hand on her shoulder, “Cayla, stop watching it, that’s an order.”

She nods, “Yes, sir.”

“Cayla, you’re a good person. That makes you perfect for your job, you empathize with your patients, whether you know them or not.”

She nods again, smiling weakly. “I do, don’t I?”

He smiles as he stands, “Yes, you do. Finish your tea if you need to, but don’t leave those boys alone too long.”

She blushes slightly as she nods, “Yes, sir.” Before she can look back at the table, he’s out the door. With a sigh she puts the tea back in the converter and heads back to her station.

* * *

John comes out of Alpha’s room with an odd look on his face. “Does anyone know what he looks like?”

Cayla, still behind the desk, looks up at him, “Nope. All we do know is what his DNA tells us, he’s a white male, and given some of the trace elements in him, most likely from somewhere in the North America continent, and he’s spent time onboard a starship.”

Having heard some of the conversation, Dan comes out of Beta’s room and asks, “What about her?”

“Aside from her DNA confusion, trace elements say she’s been where he’s been, most likely at the same time. That’s the main reason they’re here, together.”

John smiles, “Think they know each other?”

Cayla smiles, “They more than know each other. A forensic DNA scan found heavy trace of his DNA on her, and hers, on him, especially around the mouth. Quantities and tissue type suggest they kissed just prior to entering cryo.”

Dan turns around and steps back into Beta’s room as John sits and asks, “You’re saying they love each other?”

Now Cayla blushes, “Is that such a hard thing to believe? What other reason can you think of as to why two people would stay together like that?”

John shrugs, “Well, assuming her DNA is correct, they are different species, maybe she’s his pet, or slave.”

"I would say they had sex." Dan states, as he comes out of the room, getting both their attention.

"Really?" Cayla asks. "What leads you to that conclusion?"

"She bit him."

John's jaw drops, "What!? How do you get sex from a bite?"

Dan stutters, but manages to explain. "I was curious, so I did my own scan, looking for tissue density changes. I found a pattern of scars on the right side of his neck and collar. I found this odd since there's no evidence of underlying damage. I did a scan of her teeth, and they match. At some point, she bit him once on the neck and collar.

"The location of the scars didn't make sense to me, at least not till you said they kissed. So I just gave her a quick scan. She's been spayed."

"Spayed?" John asks. "What's that?"

"It's archaic practice of preventing pets from having young." He shakes his head in disbelief, "Hasn't been done in nearly a thousand years. If she really *was* a cat, she was his pet, he had her spayed. I would guess that sometime later, she was—altered, and became more than a pet."

"Ok, but how do you get 'they had sex' from the bite?" John asks.

"From the position of the bite, his height, and her height, Chris ran simulations and the only way she could bite him there, at that angle, is if he was seated, and she on straddling him while on her knees. His right arm would also have to be wrapped around her, to hold her close. The position, and the fact she's not a virgin, strongly suggests penetration."

Cayla smiles, "Very good deductions, and so you know, your findings agree with everything that we've learned in the past."

Dan takes a heavy breath and lets it out slowly, "Thank you."

John manages to ask, "You barely speak on the transport, get lost in the halls, and then shock me with that? How...?"

Dan smiles, "I might be going for a surgeons degree, but I started in forensics and psychology."

John shakes his head, not believing what he just heard. "Seriously? How...."

A sudden announcement alarm, and flashing lights, interrupt him. "Please evacuate the main hall. Predator loose—" The alarm suddenly changes, as do the lights. "Containment breach. Nano-contaminate breach. Please report to your safe area."

Cayla sits up suddenly, "What the hell!?" She turns to the screen, "Security feed, incident origin."

The screen comes on as John and Dan step up behind her. The image resolves into a laboratory. There's no one inside, but it looks like something large plowed its way through, leaving a path of broken equipment and furniture in its wake.

"Where's that?" John asks.

"Ground level, section forty," Cayla answers.

John wrinkles his brow in thought, "That just inside from the quarantine area."

"Marc?" Cayla states. The screen changes to show the outside quarantine area. At first glance it looks normal, but after a brief moment, Cayla states, "Where's the karnesh?"

John notices something else, "There's no people. Their equipment's still there, but the people..."

Dan interrupts, "What are those?"

The camera quickly zooms on a few distant objects, all of which are running away. "Hammer-tails, Nodosaur. I'd say their running from the karnesh."

"What are they doing in the quarantine area?" Dan asks.

"Probably strayed in, happens sometimes."

The alarm interrupts again, and Cayla feels her heart sink as it says, "Hermetic seals activated. Do not leave your safe area."

John looks up at the ceiling, "We're in our safe area, right?"

"Yeah, we are, but we're not getting out now." To reinforce her point, the whole room starts to shake, rattling the equipment.

"What the hell?" John says.

"We're really not going anywhere now. Those are the main isolation doors," Cayla states. "We're sealed in."

"W-w-what's going on?" Dan asks, his fear obvious.

"Mark rewind security feed to thirty seconds prior to alerts. Stay on the lab."

Everything suddenly stops shaking, and the alert changes. "Hermetic seal complete, pressurizing wing."

Dan, now shaking in a chair, squawks, "P-p-pressure?"

"It's to keep something out. If there's a leak, we'll know soon enough," Cayla states, realizing that whatever happened, is very severe. She clutches her hands together, trying to hide her own fear, in two minutes, the alert went from an animal loose to the worst case scenario. She takes a deep breath and says, "Kill alert audios, start playback of security feed."

The screen shows the lab, nice neat or orderly. Nearly twenty people walk about inside, working at various stations. All seems peaceful for a moment, until the doors on the right side of the screen explode inward.

Through the doors runs a karnesh, but it doesn't stop. It simply runs straight through everything, people, equipment, and out the doors on the left. Within seconds, the people in the lab start disappearing, no, evaporating, leaving only their AI implants to fall to the ground.

"What the hell..." John groans.

"Marc, I need to know what was in that room, now." Cayla quickly moves to the screen at the back of the room. "Display facility map, highlight seals, isolate human lifesigns, and show path of destruction from karnesh."

The screen quickly show a wire frame view of the facility, and John and Dan get their first look at how expansive it truly is. A yellow line appears, leading from quarantine area outside, through several security doors, through the lab, and continues into the core area, stopping at the doors to the central causeway.

"Crap," Cayla mutters as a counter appears below. It quickly starts to count up, as the map fills with red dots. She glances at the counter, 3174, that's the population of the facility.

"I don't want AI signatures, just human biological." The number quickly drops, nearing two thousand before the count slows. All the people, who weren't in a safe area when the hermetic seals closed, are gone.

Unable to hide her fear, she covers her mouth with her shaking hands. After a few controlled breaths, she manages to say, "Show command staff."

Five of the red dots turn blue, indicating the senior staff, only to have two of those dots fade to nothing, and two other red dots turn blue, representing the next most senior people. She starts checking where the blue dots are located, and they are currently in sealed safe areas.

She quickly reviews the map, and realizes something. "It's outside, and airborne."

John looks up at the map, "How can you tell?"

She sighs, "The people in the observation deck are gone. The only way there right now, is out the front, up the side, and back in the vents there."

He looks down at the counter as it drops below fifteen hundred. He looks up at Cayla, and sadly asks, "We're not going to get out of this, are we?"

She looks at the screen, thinking he might be right, when suddenly all the dots in the medical bay disappear. Feeling a rumble roll through the floor and walls, Cayla quietly states, "Not if I can help it. Marc, anything?"

The AI's voice, normally reserved only for the host, comes from the screen, "Yes. It's a nanite-virus, designed for claiming real-estate in a war."

Dan comes out of the bathroom, looking white, "It's a anti-people weapon?"

"Correct."

"We're doomed." He then turns and goes back into the bathroom, looking like he's going to puke again.

Cayla turns and heads back to the desk. After sitting at the desk, tears start to roll from her face. "Marc, tell me about this nanite-virus." Buries her face in her hands and cries as she listens to him speak.

John sits in a chair nearby and watches her cry for a minute. Not knowing what else to do, he simply waits, and wonders why. Why him. Why now.

Dan comes out of the bathroom with a wet around his neck. He slowly walks over, and joins John, "What's she doing?"

"Aside from crying?"

"I'm coming up with a plan," she says, then slowly sits up. "Marks sending you a list. Use the industrial converter in the hall to make it, then bring it all in here." She then gets up and heads into the second room on the left.

She opens a drawer and pulls out a silver, gun-like injector. Still fighting back tears, she grabs the only silver bottle there, and two of the grey bottles from the drawer. As she crosses to Alpha's room, she loads the silver, and a grey bottle into the top of the gun and makes some adjustments to it.

Before doing anything, she puts her hand flat to the window, "Hope to see you soon."

She then reaches into a drawer and pulls out a needle nearly a half meter long, and attaches it to the injector. After opening a small door just to the side of the window, she inserts the needle through the membrane, into the cryo-tube.

With a little effort, she lines the needle up with Alpha's stomach, then pushes it in. Squeezing the trigger, she slowly injects the contents of both bottles into him. When it beeps, she slowly pulls the injector out.

As she walk to Beta's room, she puts the needle and both empty bottles in the converter. After loading the one last bottle, she fetches a new needle. Just like she did with Alpha, she inserts the needle into Beta's belly and injects the contents of the bottle. As she returns to the desk, she drops both the injector and needle in the converter.

They disappear with a flash, and John asks, "What'd you give 'em?" Cayla sighs, "I gave him our only prototype AI, and her some nanites." "Why?"

"Why not? Like you said, we're not getting out of here, at least not now. We have cryo-tubes we can put ourselves in to survive. They'll need some advantage when they awaken—if we don't make it. This virus is airborne, that means the whole planet is contaminated, and we have no way of knowing how long it'll be that way."

"But there's safety protocols for nanites."

Looking up at the map, she watches a few more red lights disappear, "Obviously they're not working."

He sighs, "Come on Dan, let's start getting the camping supplies."

As Dan stands, he asks, "Why camping?"

"Think of it this way," John states, "If we need—" The doors close behind them, cutting off his answer.

Cayla sits back down at the desk and adjusts the screen. Despite the fact that she's been crying, she starts the video log recorder, and does her best to compose herself. After wiping tears away, she starts to speak.

"If anyone gets this message, it's intended for the man in cryo-tube Alpha One Alpha and the cat-girl in cryo-tube Alpha One Beta. Hopefully they survive to hear this."

Unintentionally interrupting as he comes back in, John asks, "Where...?"

She gestures to the far end of the room, "Just set it down somewhere and get the rest of it in here." Turning back to the camera, she continues, "I will present this message as if I'm speaking directly to them, and I'm going to be direct."

"If you have amnesia, I'm sorry, but we have no information on who you are or when you were entered into cryo. All we know is you two predate the Gene War, and that your pods are not a design we're familiar with. I have taken the liberty of installing our prototype A.I.M.E. unit into the human male. I hope she can be of significant use to you. Unfortunately her software is incomplete, but she should be able to write her own once she has the details. I wish I had more information about both of you, for you." She sighs heavily, as the guys come in with more boxes.

"This facility was placed here to research the natural environment, which roughly parallels Earth's Cretaceous period, and to study how native Earth life interacts with this planet's native life. The real, classified, reason for this facility is to create new sentient life forms based on the non-sentient life available to us."

"We started with several species of Earth's mammals, using nanites to modify the DNA, we controlled their rapid evolution until they were humanoid. We started teaching them how to speak, make things, and survive on their own, even setting up villages for them. Once they were set, we started working on new ones. Some were close enough to Earth's that we could easily evolve them, while others were resistant to the process." She paused for a moment, looking at Dan for a moment as he sits and cries. "You can review the Evolved Species files for more details."

"Yesterday, a small herd of nodosaurs stampeded in and set loose a karnesh we had locked in quarantine. It went crazy, crashed through several doors and broke into a nano lab, interrupting a test. It destroyed a container with a nanite-virus in it, they splashed over several lab techs, killing them instantly."

“The nanite-virus acts like an infection, its actions are two fold; first it finds and rewrites the programming of any nanite it encounters, and it then uses the body of the host as material to start replicating more nanites. The victim will appear to evaporate, or dissolve, leaving behind any thing non-organic, like their AI.”

“With the first victims, it was still liquid based, but it quickly went airborne. They started to infect more people.” She sniffs, holding back tears and emotions. “You can watch the security videos for that.”

“By the time the facility went into decontamination mode, they had already spread into the ventilation system. All the decontamination did was slow the process down from a few minutes to several hours. Our wing went hermetic when the decontamination was initiated. Being as far away from the point of origin as we are, we can only hope that the nanites don’t get in, but we can’t get out either. I suppose, this is why all research was moved off Earth.” She paused for a moment, again fighting off the urge to cry as she looks off at the map on the far wall.

“Facility sensors indicate that less than half of the staff is left, isolated and sealed in various areas, but the virus is getting to some of them. We’re guessing that the it can get through the decontamination seals.”

“All the animals, evolved or not, should be immune to the virus, it’s tailored to only attack humans. Since it had direct access to the quarantine area outside, I have to consider the planet contaminated. The few of us that remain are preparing for the worst; we’re putting equipment and supplies, here, inside the monitoring room. Once we’re ready, we’ll put ourselves in cryo, and set the countdown timers to match yours. If we don’t make it, you will be on your own.”

“Just incase that happens, I have given you the only A.I.M.E. available, as I stated, she’s a prototype, developed parallel to the nanite-virus. Among other things, she should be immune to it. I have also placed a few upgrades for her in your pod room. There are ANRCs, and a military package, as well as the new DNA Doppelganger, much safer than the genetic software, which will allow you to alter your body as needed, but with greater control and no vulnerabilities. I pray you don’t have to use them though. All of these use the same prototype subsystems, just like your A.I.M.E. uses, so they should be immune also.”

She again wipes tears from her eyes, and looks over at John, “Is that all of the supplies?” she asks someone, “Thank you.” She turns back to the camera, tries to smile, and says “Hope to see you soon.”

After deactivating the recording, she breaks down and lets herself cry again.

* * *

It’d taken some doing, and despite losing one of the safe areas to the virus while trying, John kept at it until he managed to contact all the people currently left alive. They now wait, conferenced together so they can talk.

Cayla looks at the few dozen faces on the screen, most appear to have been crying, some look more like they’re mad, but all are trapped.

Being the most senior of the survivors, Cayla’s now in charge, “Ladies and gentlemen, I wish I could offer you salvation, but instead, I am saddened to say, with what I’ve learned about the virus, we can’t wait it out. It’s only a matter of time.”

“What are we supposed to do?” someone asks.

“I wish I had an answer for you. As you’re all aware, it’s airborne, and it’s gotten outside. That means whatever rescue comes is also at risk.”

“Should we disconnect the mayday?” another asks.

“I’ve already tried. We’d have to shut down the whole decontamination process.”

“That’d kill us all,” one states.

“I want to live while I can. Upload my AI’s data to the core while it’s still possible,” another protests.

“Please! Everyone.” Cayla holds her arms up for silence. “I would not deny anyone’s wishes to live. That is a good idea, record a message, upload your AI’s data, that way we are not forgotten.”

Most start to mumble, but one asks, “Don’t you have access to cryo-tubes?”

Cayla had feared this question, but answers honestly, “Yes, and I have not idea if they will protect us either.”

“But you’ll try? Someone has to survive this.”

“We are going to try, but I...” Screams interrupt, as someone alone in a room, vanishes.

“It’s getting through the seals!” someone cries as someone else, in another room disappears.

The others being to panic, and Cayla tries to calm them. “People, please, if you have things to say—” the video link suddenly goes blank. Shocked, she turns to John, “What happened?”

“It’s gone. I can’t re—” A tremor suddenly rocks the facility. “There’s been an explosion.”

“Into you’re cryo-tubes, NOW!” Cayla runs to the first room as the other two dash into the second. In moments she stripped out of her normal clothes and is putting on the cryo suit.

After another tremor, the alarm sounds again, “Warning, pressure dropping. Leak detected.”

Without thinking, she cries, “Marc, kill all my nanites, NOW! I don’t want this thing eating me like that.” She quickly pulls on the hood and steps into the cryo-tube. After slapping the sequence begin button, the door starts to close. She quickly puts on the mask, hooks up her breathing tube and attaches the safety straps.

Wondering how she’ll survive the freezing process without her nanites, she thinks to her AI, *Marc, sedate me.*

Within moments, sleep takes her.