# Singularity

Drones were never this much of a problem in my dad’s day. That’s what he used to say, at least until a wild roomba took his legs off. That was at the start of all this. If he wasn’t victim number one, he was up there. Dad was an engineer who worked at NYLE, and a fine one at that. To this day his work on the hachis take the lives of hundreds everyday. It wasn’t just the hachis, though. Plenty of droids got the bug. Warehouse shippers, delivery drones, roombas. Hachis only compounded the problem.

I heard a gunshot echo through the warehouse. It was probably just Sam taking out another Delivr, trademark NYLE. I decided I should stop typing at my desk and go check out what it brought us this time. When I stood up I noticed Braden was sleeping on some crates. Hopeless. Maybe I’ll talk to Rogue about reprimanding him later. By the time I got to Sam he was already sifting through the package. I went straight for the drone’s bullet wound to see if I could pry it open. I didn’t really care for whatever was in the package, even if it was food. I didn’t eat much anyway. Braden was likely to snatch it all up anyway.

My dad showed me how to take apart a Delivr when he was still alive. He brought one home one day just to show me. He plopped a model CZ on the table, shining with its fresh chrome shielding. “It looks like a big pirahnna. If pirahnna had propeller blades,” I observed. He chuckled and pulled out Ellie, his trusty wrench.

“Now you see these bolts. Erin, are you paying attention? Look at these black bolts here,” he said pointing at the belly, “Notice they have a little red marker on them. You can’t undo these. Don’t even try, it’ll just end terribly.”

“Okay?”

“But look here at this one. This one’s marked blue. They don’t come this way, I marked it for you. Here, take Ellie and undo this bolt. Yeah, like that. Now you can just pull away the UV filter on his eyes and, boom!” he said. I pulled the pirahnna’s visor away and it had two little cameras for eyes and a USB port for a nose. How cute.

The guy Sam shot out of the sky didn’t seem to have the same charm. Fortunately Sam hit the propeller shaft on the mark and the body wasn’t damaged. The propellers were the problem on the Delivrs, that and the weight of the body could do some damage, even for such a light droid. I pulled out Ellie and removed the right bolt. I popped the visor off and shoved the detox stick in its nose port, just in case. Took a few tries to get the right orientation for the stick, but it went in eventually. Now to wait until the detox finished.

I sat back on a boulder and watched Sam. It looked like he was nearly done, but it also looked like he was trying to ply something open with his knife. “You okay over there?” I asked, though I knew engaging him in conversation may have dire consequences, especially with his knife out.

“Shouldn’t you be hacking something right now, hero?” he scoffed.

“Hacking takes time, I’ll have you know.”

“So does scavenging. Y’know, something that will actually keep us alive out here.”

“You’re a peach. What’d you find?”

“Jerkey, canned pears, and a packet of tissues.”

“And?”

“Why don’t you go look for yourself?” he struggled with some kind of metal box, “I’m sure you’ll find some reason to take it.” He finally popped the lid off the box. Empty. “Worthless piece of shit,” he cursed, tossing the bits aside. The parts landed in his junk pile, right next to a pack of chalk and a bicycle chain.“These bots just get stupider and stupider. Your pops thought somebody would need all of this all at once?” he asked me.

“He always told me support vector machines work in mysterious ways. Ooh, it looks like detox is finishing. Great talking to you, Sammy, but I gotta go,” I said. He sneered. I scurried over to the droid and swiped the detox stick out of its nose. Just then it powered off, and I could here the whirring of its fan fade slowly into silence. The droid was dead.

I spent most the rest of my day at my desk, preparing for our journey to NYLE headquarters in the morning. Rogue returned sometime at sunset and decided to pay me a visit. She likes to interrupt me at the most inopportune of times. She’s the kind of person that’ll wander right up to you and give you a whistle, but by then she’s either flipped everything on your desk that can be picked up or doodled on every loose piece of paper in the room. Although sometimes I wonder if she can do that because she’s a good thief or that I need to pay attention more.

Eventually Sam got Braden to lug back today’s haul to the warehouse while he kindled a fire. By the time Sam called for dinner I managed to decrypt almost the entire layout of the NYLE facility. “Erin, darling, come eat. Braden’s been eyeing your tuna since last night, I’m not sure how long he’ll hold,” Rogue called.

“I’m coming, I’m coming,” I responded. I don’t think they particularly liked me much for being Mr. Apocalypse’s daughter, but they at least cared somewhat. I sat down at the fire pit next to all of them. The night had finally settled in, and the aura of the flames was the only light illuminating the warehouse. The shadows danced on their faces, and I’m sure I looked no different. I stared at my tuna can, half eaten from last night. Gourmet food, really, compared to my dad’s dinners. Not that he was a bad cook, but he had a bad habit of working after hours. Everyone else was silent, even Rogue. Normally she’s very chit-chatty during dinner, but I could tell they were all probably thinking about something else. A plan for tomorrow. I decided I should try to calm their nerves. I spoke up, “I have a map, you know.” They all looked up at me. Maybe I shouldn’t have said anything.

“So… that means you know where we’re going, right?” Braden asked, “Like, which room we need to get to? Where they’re making the hachis?”

“The main hachi assembly line is miles away. The NYLE corporate building is where they keep their server farm. Without their servers, the hachis will not be able to communicate with each other. That means the source of the bug will be cut off from the rest of the world. Understand?” I told him.

“No,” Braden said, “But I’ll take your word for it.” He doesn’t listen to a damn thing I say, even when he asks.

“So you can take us to their server room? And we wreck the place?” Rogue asked, “Doesn’t sound too hard.”

Therein lies the problem. I told her, “That’s the problem, though. Taking out servers isn’t hard at all, especially at this scale. Servers go down all the time, on their own. Ever have a website completely break on you? It’s because a server went down.”

“So that means somebody is maintaining those servers?” Sam asked.

“Aw, shit,” Rogue said, “Does that mean we’re going to have to, y’know, ‘deal’ with some guy?”

“Wait, is he the one who made the bug?” Braden asked.

I went quiet. I didn’t want them to panic, but I knew that whoever was holding out at NYLE definitely made the bug, was actively spreading it out, and probably wasn’t alone. Server farms took teams of people to keep alive. Even if he was a master hacker he couldn’t possibly be doing server maintenance alone. But who would help him? And why? Those were questions I couldn’t answer, and I wouldn’t want them to ask about it.

“Erin?”

“He might have written the bug. We won’t know for sure until we get there,” I told Braden.

“Bullshit,” Sam called, “You must know something else. Your old man taught you everything he knew, and he caused all this!”

“He didn’t teach me everything. Just enough so I could get us this far. Dad didn’t talk about work much. I really don’t know what’s inside that building, besides what this map can tell,” I told him. That wasn’t a lie. He never even took me to NYLE once. I don’t think he would have even if I asked.

“Well, what does that map tell you, hon?” Rogue asked, clearly attempting to defuse the situation, “Where are we going tomorrow?”

“Their campus is divided into several districts. The servers are located in the blue district. Each district had a different encryption key, which is why it took all day. I managed to crack everything but the red district, but that’s okay. I think all the execs offices were in that area. We won’t be needing to go over there.”

“Can you run the decryption over night anyway, just in case?” Sam asked.

“Wish I could, but my computer’s on its last legs. I’d need another power cell from a droid,” I told him.