

# Chapter 1

"So, how goes the destruction of public facilities?" Pandora rolled her eyes as Ian's voice crackled over her headset.

"There was an issue," she replied, whispering.

"An issue?"

"Yeah, a General Enforcement issue. Apparently they don't like explosives. However they do seem to be fond of shooting at moving targets, specifically me."

"Are you okay?"

"I've locked myself in a room, and am praying to God, or whatever powers-that-be, they don't find me, seeing as I've only got four shots left. So if you would kindly shut up." Pandora whispered into the headset. Outside she heard the cold, mechanical clicking of the General Enforcement Drones walking down the hallway. As the steps grew closer, she scanned the room for escape routes. She couldn't go back into the hall, the GE was out there. She might be able to jump out the window, but she was on the fourth floor of St. John's Regional Hospital, so that was pretty much a death wish. Briefly, the thought of breaking through the wall into the room next to her crossed her mind. The building was cheaply and quickly constructed, and ten or twenty years of poor upkeep may mean that she'd be able to make it through the plaster wall.

*No that's stupid*, she thought to herself, *I'm a really, really stupid person for thinking that*. It looked like combat was her only option, so she drew her pistol. Smith & Wesson SW1911, best gun ever made in her opinion. And insanely hard to get your hands on after the GE's total domination. GE stood for Global Empire, General Enforcement was the name of their military division. Their science program was called General Experimentation, their space program, General Exploration, their educational system, General Education. They even had their own economy, General Economy. Of course the economy was a joke, the government provided the essentials, housing, beds, food, showers, etc.

Pandora was shaken out of her thoughts when she heard the General Enforcement Drones in the room next to her. They were methodically sweeping the area; if she somehow managed to escape undetected, they would continue searching for hours. They didn't rest, they didn't tire. They were perfect, in every sense of the word. That was their slogan, the slogan of the entire GE: We Are Perfect. Every billboard, every advertisement, every propaganda poster. We Are Perfect.

Mechanical footsteps indicated to Pandora that the GE was outside her door. She held her breath and total silence fell for a few seconds. Then Ian's voice came through the headset.

"Is this a bad time?" He asked. Bullets made Swiss cheese out of the doorway, and the General Enforcement burst into the room. They looked like mechanical skeletons, harsh, sharp geometric shapes made up their bodies, with black eye sockets containing cameras. In place of a lower right arm they had machine gun-esque devices with an elongated, upside-down, teardrop-shaped barrel.

Pandora fired off a shot from her pistol before the GE could open fire on her, grazing but not damaging one of the three drones. They ordered her to stand-down, she shot one of them in its 'head', killing it, and the other in its chest, which barely damaged it. Two rows of red lights lit up on the side of the GE Drones' weapons, indicating the switch to Full-Auto. Pandora fired her last shot, it ripped through on the Drone's arm-mounted gun, ruining it. The second Drone paused for about two seconds to assess the damage done to its comrade. Pandora didn't hesitate for a second, she jumped over the hospital bed she had been taking cover behind and more or less slid into the hallway.

Drones were on her in seconds. In addition to the ones that had found her hiding place, there were also five or six in the hallway. GE Drones were slow to react, but once they did they were deadly shots, eighty-nine point seven percent of their shots made contact. Pandora made a mad dash for the staircase at the end of the hall as the Drones opened fire, a single bullet whizzed

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through her left arm as she burst into the stairwell.

She cursed loudly, and began running down the stairs, doing her best to ignore the searing pain in her arm. Around the time she reached the third-story landing, five GE started down the stairwell after her. She ducked into another hallway and began looking for a different way out, another staircase, maybe even an elevator. Mechanical footsteps drew closer and she was forced to run without any idea of where her next exit was. Luck was on her side though, as soon as she rounded the corner into the next hallway she saw an elevator. The GE Drones were clunky and slow, and so she was able to put enough distance between herself and them. Pandora slammed both the down and up buttons and clutched her injured arm.

The elevator doors slid open. Pandora got in and pressed the button for ground level, then repeatedly smashed the "Close Door" button. Just as the door slid shut, she saw the General Enforcement rounding the corner. They opened fire; luckily the elevator's thick metal doors were enough to protect her.

Pandora slumped back against the wall, and tore a section off her black scarf to wrap around as a makeshift piece of gauze. She rummaged through the ammo pouch she wore around her waist, hoping that she had missed a cartridge, or had some rounds remaining in one. No such luck. With a sigh she rubbed her eyes, then cracked her neck. The elevator slid to a stop and the doors opened.

Two dozen or so GE Drones were crawling around the lobby, most of them had heard the elevator and surrounded it. Two rows of lights lit-up on each of their weapons, and Pandora just stood still. She began walking out of the elevator, and the GE took aim. She sped up, and a single order echoed through the ranks of the GE: 'Fire'.

Pandora broke into a full run, and bullets flew everywhere. She slid down, underneath one of the Drones, tripped it with her leg, and quickly got to her feet and was sprinting towards the front door again. A bullet pierced her already injured arm as she rammed the door open with her other one.

Across the street was a black sedan; it was where Ian had been camping out the entire time. He was communicating with and tracking Pandora with his laptop from in there, and intercepting any transmissions from the GE, so he could warn Pandora if she was detected. He wasn't very good at that last bit. Pandora slid over the hood of the sedan, and a bullet shredded her calf. Ian opened the passenger-side door for her.

"Yes Ian," Pandora said, "that was the most awful time you could have ever picked."

"Well, I picked up a GE signal and thought you should know about it. They had detected you..."

"Yeah, I got that sometime around the point when I was looking down the barrel of a gun. Next time tell me before I'm about to be minced," Pandora snapped.

"Love you too," Ian muttered. Pandora ignored him and pulled out a small, black detonator.

"Ready," Pandora asked, but didn't wait for a response, "Go." She pressed the detonator and the twenty-five C4 charges she had placed throughout the hospital detonated. The entire building glowed a brilliant orange for two or three seconds before massive clouds of brown smoke billowed through the windows and the whole thing collapsed in on itself. Ian hit the gas and the sedan was off. Normally, they would worry about having to ditch their getaway car, in early days the GE had reviewed their security camera footage and had been able to track Pandora and Ian based on the car they had escaped in. However, a while ago Ian had figured out how to hack the GE cameras and make them loop footage. So all he had to do was make the camera take a video of an empty street and make it loop for a few hours. For all the General Enforcement knew, the sedan had never been there.

Ian casually drove past the incoming Drones. The GE didn't even notice them, they were too preoccupied with the pile of rubble that had previously been St. John's Regional Hospital. Pandora and Ian were less than a block away when a loud, shrill siren echoed throughout the streets. It was the "Public Disturbance Notification" System, and it meant the streets would be crawling with GE in seconds. In the distance Pandora heard a repetitive, continuous beating, the rotors of a helicopter. It was a GE Helicopter, a Wasp Copter. Deadly fast, two missile pods, and

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relentless. And it was after them.

"Hear that Ian?" Pandora asked.

"Wasp, yeah I hear it. Getting closer too. Think we can shake it?"

"No, just keep driving. It's close and it'll find us at some point, we're going to have bring it down."

"Hey Ian, let's take down a Helicopter with a pistol and a sedan that's almost out of gas, ' yeah that will work fantastically."

"Shut up, no one asked you," Pandora growled, and reached around to the backseat for some ammo. Ian had stocked it up with various cartridges for her pistol, and he had thrown in her SPAS-12 Shotgun along with some buckshot rounds, for good measure. Pandora reached for the shotgun, realized how cliché it would be if she were riding in the passengers seat wielding a shotgun, and instead opted to grab a few magazines and use her pistol.

The beating of the Wasp Copter drew nearer. The General Enforcement "Search and Destroy" Helicopter, as it was formally know, was an entirely robotic system. Rather than housing a human pilot, the cockpit contained a smallish supercomputer that ran the Copter's AI, targeting systems, etc. On either side of the cockpit were large, circular, rotating missile pod, each containing six short-range ballistic missiles. The idea behind the Wasp Copter was to have a highly mobile unit capable of pursuit and immense firepower. Needless to say, the Copter more than delivered.

"Alright, as you aptly noted we don't have much of a chance to bring it down," Pandora said.

"See how much easier things would be if we had an RPG?"

"I think we're just going to have to let it chase us. If it's fully loaded, which it should be, it still only has twelve missiles. That's not a lot right? I mean, we can dodge that... Right?"

"Somehow, when I was a kid, I never really expected that running from a military helicopter intent on raining death upon me would ever become 'just another Tuesday'," Ian mused.

The Wasp Copter rose up from the skyline like a beast from a steel jungle. Pandora leaned slightly out of the car window, still trying to see if she could figure out a way to take it down with her pathetic armaments. There was a brief quiet, the Helicopter closing in, Pandora leaning out the window, Ian flooring the pedal. Then the first missile fired. It crashed into a building a few yards from the sedan, erupting in an inferno and a small storm of dust. The concussive wave slammed against their car, and Pandora was nearly thrown out onto the street. She quickly ducked back inside the sedan and buckled herself in, deciding that her weapons were no good in this situation.

Ian took a hard right and an intersection as the Helicopter fired it's second missile. The explosion was much closer this time, barely missing the car itself. Instead it blew a chunk out of the ground near a street lamp, causing the lamp to fall over and crush a car across the street. Missiles three and four were fired simultaneously, one hitting just slightly behind and to the left of the car, causing it to lunge forward, missile four hit where they had been less than a second ago. Pandora was whip-lashed, and Ian's face smashed against the steering wheel, causing his nose to start to bleed.

"We're screwed if this keeps up, Pandora."

"I know, I'm working on it! Just shut up and keep driving!" Pandora clamored over the seats as the sixth missile was fired, thankfully missing it's target by several yards. The Helicopter decided to change tactics and flew over their heads, turned around when it was several yards in front of them, and unleashed a barrage of four missiles. The first one hit an electrical pole which fell over, snapping away the wires and plunging the street into darkness in the process. Immediately after another missile devastated the front of an apartment complex, and yet another blew a massive hole into the concrete just in front of the sedan. Ian, with almost superhuman reflexes dodged around the hole, and narrowly avoided the last missile, however shrapnel from the explosion was embedded into the side of their car.

"Okay, so, you said you were working on a solution, but to me it just looks like you're

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hiding in the backseat."

"We're going to have to bail," Pandora glowered.

"We're what?" Ian asked.

"Jump."

"Out of a moving car? We're pulling, what, sixty miles per hour? You want us to *jump*?"

"Yeah, that's the general concept," Pandora replied, "When it is about to fire it's last missile, slam on the breaks and jump out the side." Pandora shoved all the munitions in the back into her ammo pouch (or at least, as much as she could), holstered her pistol, and hopped into the passenger's seat. The second to last missile whizzed right next to the car, missing by less than a fraction. Ian completely lost control of the car, which had been sent into a deadly spin by the ripple of the missile. The Helicopter's left barrel rotated, and the final missile was ready to fire. Without even giving an order, Pandora jumped out of her door while Ian more or less fell out of his. Pandora managed to avoid most of the impact by executing a somersaulting roll, and was only skinned. However Ian was not as lucky, the asphalt cutting deep into his right arm and leg. The car continued on for five feet before the last missile collided with it. Pandora, who had managed to get back to her feet, was thrown to the ground again due to the shockwave. Shrapnel filled the air, one piece cutting through Pandora's good arm, another embedding itself into Ian's ankle, and various other larger pieces crashing into windows and the ground. Ian managed to climb to a kneeling position, but couldn't bring himself to stand. Pandora, running on almost nothing but adrenaline and willpower stood up, wobbled a bit, and looked at the Helicopter. It sat in the air, like an unsure bird of prey, unable to decide what to do. It took a few seconds for Pandora to realize what was going to happen next.

"Ian!" Pandora yelled, "Run!" Ian had found it in himself to stand up, and had even pulled the shrapnel out of his ankle. He looked at the Helicopter, and in a split-second realized what it intended to do. Pandora broke into a run, completely ignorant of all pain by now, and Ian ran for about two seconds before the agony in his ankle forced him to continue his flight limping. The Helicopter rose slightly higher into the air, and slightly backwards, aimed itself at the pair, and flung itself forward. The black behemoth exploded on the pavement in a firestorm. Machinery bent, broke, and was flung everywhere as the Wasp Copter exploded, and the rotors became deadly scythes, penetrating deep into the concrete.

"What *the hell* was that?!" Ian yelled, "Kamikaze? Seriously?!" Pandora was too weak to talk, the fringes of her vision were fading, and she was beginning to feel woozy. Ian noticed, and got to work breaking into a relatively undamaged car that was parked nearby while Pandora slumped against a wall.

There was no one on the street, there never was. People rarely even left their house, except at seven in the morning, when work began, and eight at night, when work ended. However just because there wasn't a human presence on the street didn't mean it was safe. There were cameras, they had seen the entire thing, Ian was going to have to hack into them before they left.

Pandora had taught Ian how to lock pick various vehicles a while ago, and he had learned how to hotwire them himself. Within fifteen minutes he had the car ready to go. Constantly aware that the GE was going to show up any second, he helped a limping Pandora into the backseat of the car, and lay her down. Next he dealt with the cameras. At the base of each pole on which the cameras were mounted was a small black box with a keypad that allowed access to a control panel which could be used to review, erase, and otherwise alter the video footage of that area. Ian, being the software genius that he was, had developed a program to override the keypad, edit the video content, and erase all traces of any alteration. After another five minutes, the video had no record of Pandora, Ian, the Wasp Copter, or the car they were about to drive off in. By the time the GE realized something was wrong Pandora and Ian would have disappeared totally.

Ian got into the front seat of the car, put on his seat belt (*Safety first*, he thought, dryly), and began driving towards their "HQ" as the two criminals jokingly called it. It was their base of operations, their hideout and home. A dingy little hole in the wall. Pandora was busy fighting off sleep, but too tired to talk, so the two of them were left alone with their thoughts, and Ian was wondering what he had done to get where he was.

## *Pandora Tainted*

The Global Empire, GE for short, had taken power just over a decade ago. There was no war, no massive shift of power or uprising. The GE started as an alliance between nations, similar to the UN, then it slowly, almost imperceptibly, became a sort of unifying government, then it became the world's only government. Some people spoke out, saying that no one government should rule the world, others advocated a global unification, the public was divided.

At first, the Global Empire wasn't truly global. There were twelve nations that refused to join: Russia, China, Canada, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Italy, Brazil, Egypt, Pakistan, and North Korea. One by one though, they were slowly assimilated with the exception of North Korea, until it's collapse, at least.

The GE operated in various different branches, one branch would cover things such as economics, another the environment, and so on. The first official branch of the GE was called General Education, and it was a massive success. It provided standardized, high-quality, free education to every country that was a member of the Global Empire. It was funded by a small tax that every citizen payed, and since the GE was, well, global, this meant that the tax was an imperceptible addition to the taxes people were already paying.

After the success of General Education, a lot of the worries that the populous had were put to rest, and people began to trust the Global Empire. Two new branches were introduced, General Experimentation and General Exploration, the former dedicated to scientific studies and the latter tasked with the exploration of space. Due to these two branches, technology progressed in leaps and bounds. Self-aware Artificial Intelligence, holograms, genetic coding, and many other innovations were created. However, these inventions were kept under lock and key, and hidden from the public by the GE.

Five years after the GE was definitely the sole government of the planet, the idea of an "Intervener" came into play. The Global Empire was led by a conglomerate of other world leaders, but it had no *sole* leader, no figurehead. It was decided that the GE needed a face, and so the position of Intervener was created. The Intervener's job was to, essentially, diffuse heated situations. He would step in wherever needed, in wars, in corporate feuds, in local rebellions, and take control of the situation. He made sure everything ran smoothly, he made sure people did their jobs right, and if they didn't he took over. There was a global election, it took all of three years, and eventually, a man named Penn Smith was elected to be the GE's Intervener.

Things did not go well at first. It became clear that the Intervener needed a way to enforce his authority. Thus, the General Enforcement was created. Global law enforcement, without petty worries such as jurisdiction, it's sole purpose was to make sure that the Intervener's word was followed to the letter. They became judge, jury, and sometimes even executioner. An organization like that has a massive potential for disaster, but the GE hadn't been wrong before had it?

Penn, during the fifth year of his term, decided that the citizens of the world could not be trusted to regulate their own economy. So, General Economy was created, all 'old world' money was abolished, and the Global Empire Dollar became the world's currency. And ever so slowly, a dangerous thought crept in to Penn's mind. He was technically in control of the world's education, information, military, police, and economy.

There was a massive scandal with General Enforcement. Roughly two-thirds of the members were found to be involved with various crime rings. They were paid off to overlook things, tangled up in substance abuse, etc. It all came as a massive shock to the general public, the planet's finest were common criminals and petty thugs? Around this same time, General Experimentation had developed and perfected a new type of sentient AI that was going to be introduced as partners to the human General Enforcement operatives. One journalist put two and two together, and suggested that General Enforcement should simply be populated by these new automatons, and the human element should be phased out. And everything played right into Penn's hands.

Then there was nothing in Penn's way. He had a loyal army of drones, total control over the Global Empire. Every other leader of the Global Empire was tossed out, and Penn (or Pendarious, as he started calling himself) declared himself Emperor of Earth. If it weren't so terrifying, the cartoonish evil of it might even be funny. He brought down the economies of the world. People

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relied on GE products, GE jobs, GE housing, GE rations. Privacy was annihilated when the General Enforcement started installing CCTV cameras into every nook and cranny of the streets, then stores, then homes. Citizens were routinely pumped with drugs, sedatives and depressants, to keep them subdued, and mild amnesiacs. Their lives became one giant blur, a massive smear. Not only were they too weak and tired to fight what was happening, they weren't even *aware* that there was anything to fight. Everyone was launched into a perpetual, blissful ignorance. With the exception of two people.

By the time Pandora and Ian has reached HQ, Pandora had regained some of her strength, enough to walk anyway. HQ was located in the basement of an abandon apartment complex, and the only entrance was through bulkhead doors in the alley next to the complex. Ian didn't use any fancy electronic disguises to hide HQ, no holograms or anything like that. First off, Drones would see through holograms anyway, and secondly, the energy signature would make them light-up on the GE scanners like the Fourth of July. Instead, they simply covered the bulkhead doors with garbage and trash bags. The only high-tech security measure Ian allowed was a barely noticeable thumb-scanner on the door handles.

The other entrances to HQ had been welded shut and covered with two-inch steel sheets. On the main door, there were steel rods that automatically slid into place whenever the door was closed. Inside, HQ was almost entirely filled with Ian's electrical equipment. There was also Pandora's small ammo reserve off to the side, various living essentials (bed, refrigerator, oven), and a generator in the corner. It was entirely self-sufficient, they had their own power source, there were no windows, bare-minimum ventilation and plumbing, and the whole thing was insulated and soundproofed. They were almost entirely undetectable, and that was their greatest security.

"I'm going to crash," Pandora said as she flopped down on her bed, "Do you have any Ambrosia left?"

"Yeah, give me a second," Ian replied. Ambrosia was a serum Ian had created. A mixture of a sedative and a healing agent, it could heal almost all major injuries in just a few hours. Broken bones, snapped tendons, cuts and bullet wounds, you name it. Of course, each use had the unintended side-effect of speeding up the body's natural aging process. Ian estimated that about a month of the user's lifespan was lost with each use. Neither Pandora nor Ian intended to live to their thirties anyway.

"Thanks," Pandora smiled weakly as Ian handed her a massive syringe filled with Ambrosia, "I'm running low on the mix, we're going to have to make time to get the ingredients," Ian said, "In the mean time would you mind getting shot less? I mean, do you know how long it takes to find raw Deus Ex Machina? And then you come along and drain it all in the course of a few days."

Pandora tossed a pillow at him, "Deus Ex Machina serum though, I like the sound of that," she injected the syringe into her left arm, "Then again, a rose by any other name has just as sharp thorns..." A content tiredness washed over her body, and she was asleep in seconds. Ian stayed up a few hours afterward, unable to get to sleep, but eventually exhaustion claimed him too.

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Pandora woke up before Ian. She was slightly groggy, but that was normal after an Ambrosia-induced sleep. Realizing she had fallen asleep before changing her clothes, she went to put on a fresh outfit. Everyday Pandora wore the same thing; black, khaki pants; a soft-blue tank top, black scarf, and a soft-blue driver's cap. It was a very iconic ensemble, as she told Ian, she either didn't want to be seen, or she wanted people to know who she was when they saw her coming. Ian chalked it up to a combination of Pandora being lazy and the fact that if Pandora ever wanted a new outfit she'd have to steal it (after all, they were almost dirty poor, and all their money was put towards food.)

She was vaguely aware that she felt like getting some air. Pandora put on a gray trench

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coat, pulled her scarf up over her face, and let her hair down from under her cap. Confident that she looked sufficiently anonymous, she stepped outside. Despite it being around seven o'clock, it was almost pitch black outside. The only light came from the street lamps. In the city of Eden (the GE's capital city), the light of day hadn't been seen in years. A choking layer of smog floating above the city blocked out the sun. Occasionally, gasses in parts of the smog would ignite, making it appear as though the sky was burning.

Pandora casually strolled across the street, there was a bakery about a block away, she could get a bagel there for breakfast. People clogged the sidewalks, and cars backed up the roads, everyone rushing to their work. As Pandora handed her money to the bakery's cashier and pushed her way back on to the street, it occurred to her how easily someone could mistake Eden for a happy place. She finished her bagel and returned to HQ. Ian had woken up and was eating his own breakfast of cold cereal in front of a computer. He glanced up as he heard her footsteps.

"Oh hey, Pandora, I have something to show you," he said and got up. Next to his computer was a brown, fingerless, right-handed glove. The fingers in the pointer, middle, and thumb positions cut off midway through, and the ring and pinky had no fingers whatsoever. On the palm there were two glowing, light-blue circles, one inset inside of the other.

"It's my newest toy, it's called the Hologlove. Or rather, I named it the Hologlove. I'm so original aren't I?" Ian said, "It responds to brain wave pattern. Don't ask how, it's overly complicated, and probably breaks a few laws of physics and biology. I'm not even entirely sure how it works, I just know it does and I'm not gonna question it. Happy accident and all that... Go ahead and try it on."

Pandora did, and as soon as it was on, a holographic, blue, upside-down raindrop shape flickered to life. On either side of the lower-half of the raindrop were two circles, and inset in the upper half was a larger circle. The whole raindrop interface moved in perfect sync with her hand.

"The bar around the main circle, see it? It shows the amount of charge you have left. The main circle itself is a dial, you turn it to select different modes and such, there's PC mode, GPS, 'energy drain', and so on. By default, it's on 'discharge'. So, uhm, aim at something and think... uh, shooty thoughts? Or something."

She pointed her palm at an empty soda can on end of the room, and, as Ian instructed, 'thought shooty thoughts'. A bolt of electric-blue lightning shot from the raindrop to the can, which was entirely unharmed. A few sparks shot off the can, fizzled, and died in a generally unimpressive manner. Ian frowned.

"Let's bear in mind it's barely charged right now. You probably drained the last bit with that bolt. It's a lot more powerful when fully charged."

"Well, you know, at least it, uh... looks pretty," Pandora said with a mocking smile painted across her face.

"Sometimes, I don't know why I do anything nice for you," Ian sighed, and sat back down in his chair.

"Speaking of nice things, did you look into the clinic I wanted you to check out?"

"The one in Lowtown?" Ian asked,

"No, the other one," Pandora replied sarcastically.

"As a matter of fact, I did. And I agree with you, there is definitely something going on there, but I don't think it's a weapons manufacturing deal like St. John's was. I think it's more of an info hub or a data center. Since we have to lay low for a while anyway after the stunt we just pulled, this would be a perfect way to fill the time. I just have to get close enough to hack in, and we'll be in and out like that. You probably won't even need a weapon."

"That wasn't tempting fate in the slightest."

"Heh, knock on wood."

"Do you think we could check it out tomorrow?"

"Oh I don't know," Ian said, voice dipped in mocked worry, "I'm supposed to attend a marvelous gala tomorrow!"

"I'm sure you'll be the prettiest princess there, Ian," Pandora grabbed her SW1911 and stuffed it into her pocket, "I think I'm gonna go out for a bit."

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"When do you think you'll be back?"

"I'm not sure." She closed the door behind her and was back on the street, which was already beginning to empty. Doing her best to remain uninteresting and unnoticed, she walked out of the alley and began head to nowhere in particular. Briefly, the idea of practicing her parkour crossed her mind. It was a hobby she had gotten into a few months ago, but she dismissed the thought. No need to draw attention to herself.

After a few minutes of walking around, she noticed a few GE Drones were patrolling, and stopping random passers-by. She directed herself away from the patrol, only to spot another one down the road. Presently she became aware of various Wasp Copters circling overhead, searching the rooftops. With a sigh she decided it was time to head home. A massive, electronic billboard, mounted on the side of a building, bore her face on a white background. Above her head were the words "GE Defect No. 1". Defect, rebel, outlaw, terrorist. Defective. Broken. They worked so hard to drag her down, but why? What damage was she really doing? Small attacks here and there, sure she'd take out their manufacturing plants, but they would be rebuilt in less than a week. What was she really to them? A pest. A minor annoyance, ultimately of no consequence.

And this was the world Pandora lived in. Austere, hollow, cruel. And here was Pandora, fighting an unwinnable war with her sole ally. Sheer exhaustion was more likely to kill her than any bullet. Trying to change the unchanging, and succeeding. But succeeding on such a small scale that it didn't even matter. All these thoughts ran through her head, and then she smiled. *I should stop*, she thought, *I'm tempting fate*.