

LIMBAWAY 9: RETURN OF THE DRONE

by Paul Watson

"So, we're all agreed it's Hemmings, right?"

"Obviously it's Hemmings, Miss Sri...Marcia. But being obvious and being provable aren't the same thing. And even if it was, the primary reason for Hemmings being here, that he'd blackmail us with going to the press if not is still valid."

"I don't suppose we could..." she mimes squeezing something smaller and smaller until it vanishes between her palms.

"No, Angel, no murdering employees. Even Hemmings."

"Is it technically murder if..."

"If you're asking that question, the best course of action is to assume it is." she sighs, resting her forehead on two hands, "So, how's Loretta dealing with this?"

"Well, there's been no violence. Yet. But if Hemmings keeps needling him...her then I've no doubt there will be."

"Can you keep them apart?"

"I've been doing so to the best of my ability but the lab space isn't so big as to make that easy."

"Right. Of course. Just do your best, Doc. And that brings us to the other matter...what's the situation?"

"The company that supplied the faulty pane is happy to supply replacement equipment...at only 75% of the standard price."

"Yeah, no. Angel, you're in charge of bullying them into doing it properly."

"Why me?"

"Because you're good at it."

"Well, that is true."

"And the purple...goop?"

"Currently sealed and in storage, by which I mean a corner of the lab. We're waiting for Foster's rats to arrive before doing any tests. Frankly, I doubt it will do much. A mix between removing and restoring limbs? It should cancel out."

"But..."

"But there's no sense risking someone if that proves to be inaccur..."

The door swings open. "Excuse me, Miss Sriupathakan, there's a Miss Jacobs here. She says she's reporting for work?"

"Work?"

"Yes, ma'am. She said her name was Sindi Jacobs. She was most insistent I know how to spell her name."

"Really?"

"With two i's."

"Oh, right, her."

"Her who?"

"You remember the 'Drone Incident' we told you about?"

"Yessssss..."

"Well, the drone is apparently outside wanting to work for us."

"The drone? The woman Hemmings turned into a mindless toy? Is here? And wants to work for us?"

"Apparently."

"Not quite, Miss van Dyne." Kamala interrupts. "She doesn't *want* to work here. She thinks she *already* works here."

"Already...?" Marcia blinks. "Well, today has apparently gotten crazier. We'll be right out, Kamala. Angel, you're with me. Doc, you're back to the lab and prevent anything we need to call the police in for."

Sindi sits in the office, crossing and uncrossing her legs, the short black skirt riding up her thighs. She looks around the small office again, running a well-manicured finger through her hair, the natural frizz heavily sprayed down. A loose white blouse covers her pale skin, face minimally made up. The door opens and she starts from whatever thoughts she was having.

"Ms Jacobs."

"Oh, hi. Yes, Sindi Jacobs, that's me. Sindi with two i's to see you with." she giggles, "Oh, you've got four arms. Did you know you've got four arms? Is that normal around here? Will I need extras? Can I have extra arms? It must make things so much easier. Actually, you'd better not give me those. I'm such a klutz I'd knock over twice as many things, not do twice as many things."

Marcia sits across the table from her, Angelica trying not to smile behind her. "Ms Jacobs, why are you here?"

"Why? I mean, I work here, don't I? I signed the forms? The guy with two cocks," she looks at Angelica pleadingly, "you said it was ok to talk about that, right? It is ok, right? I mean, you've got four arms, he has two cocks, anyway, I signed the forms he gave me and he said that meant I was working here. But, I guess, my first impression wasn't that great given you all sent me home immediately. I didn't do anything wrong, did I? You said I didn't, but, you know, did I? I did, didn't I? Everyone says I'm so scatty and I don't mean to but it's my brain, you know. It just gets a thought and runs off with it. Like that dog in the cartoon with a squirrel. You know, the one with the old man and the balloons? That was so sad. I bawled my eyes out when I saw that. How could they put something soooooo sad in a movie for kids? What was the question again?"

"You didn't do anything wrong, but given what happened..."

"What happened? I..."

"You were made into a mindless drone."

"Uh-huh. That was awesome."

"Awesome?"

"I mean, like, my brain can't focus, like, at all. And as Drone, I was nothing but focus. No distractions, no jumping all over the place. It must be like a hypnotic trance. Is that a real thing? I've seen things on the Internet that say it's all fake and plants and stuff, but I've also seen stuff about them using it in medicine. They wouldn't use something that wasn't real in medicine, would they? I hope not. That would make things so bad if you couldn't even trust your doctor, you know? You have to trust someone, don't you?"

"You liked being a drone?"

"Oh, right, yes. Yes, I could concentrate and not get distracted. By anything. If I was doing something, that's all that was in my mind."

"But you'd do whatever you were told."

"I mean, maybe? I don't think I'd kill a baby if someone told me to? You can only do things you wanted to under hypnosis, right? And I don't want to kill a baby. But, you know, if you were in bed with a guy with two cocks, wouldn't you want to know what it was like? So, I don't know if I'd do *anything* but it was just...easier to do what I'm told. Because when I think I just mess things up. Everyone says so, not to my face, but they don't know I can hear them. And that kind of hurts, you know? So being Drone and not having to worry about things like that really sounds kind of awesome to me. You wouldn't want me involved in something like this. It's complicated stuff, right? I'd just mess things up. But Drone? Drone would work hard and would be focused and wouldn't get distracted because some stray thought jumped in front of her like a cat with a laser pointer and..."

"But..."

"Marcy, a word?"

Marcia and Angelica step back and begin talking quietly. Sindi doesn't pay attention, looking absently around the room.

A few minutes later, "Ok, Ms Jacobs..."

"Oh, Sindi, please. I don't like being Ms Jacobs. It makes me sound old and..."

"Ok, Sindi. What did Hemmings do to make you into...Drone?"

“Uhmhhh, he took some of that blue stuff and rubbed it on my head, and kept rubbing as my thoughts just went...away. I didn't see it, but I could still hear so I guess he didn't rub away my ears because that would mean I wouldn't be able to hear him. So like here?” she pats the top of her head and down the back of her skull. “Then he got out a pen and started...drawing on the bits he'd vanished, like on the edge and it kind of built up again? But he didn't do the middle bit, where my brain was, so I looked like me, but there wasn't a brain there? So I was still Drone? He said I was a good Drone. I like being good. Doesn't everyone like that? But then he started telling me what to do and I did it and it was so nice to not have to think and let someone else do that and tell me what I should be thinking.”

“Were you...” her four arms wave around, “Drone when he vanished your brain? Or did he have to rebuild your head?”

“He didn't call me Drone until my head was at least rebuilt a bit, but I wasn't thinking at all before then, so I guess I was Drone right away.”

“And you want to work for us? As Drone?”

“Like, I am, aren't I? I did sign the forms, didn't I?”

“They weren't done properly. We'll need to have you sign the ones about working here again.”

“Oh, sorry. I don't really get on with forms. All those questions and they're all done in ink so you can't change your mind. I am such a ditz.”

“Not a problem.” Angelica replies, “That one was on us. So we'll get those forms filled out again. And then we'll come up with some ground rules for Drone that can't change while you're mindless.”

“Like, why?”

“Just to make sure people don't take advantage of the fact that you'll agree to almost anything.”

“Oh, yes, I guess that makes sense. If you think that'll be right.”

“We do. Come back tomorrow and we can get things signed and settled.”

“So I am working here? And I'll be Drone? For reals?”

“If you want to.”

“Yay!” she claps, bouncing in her seat. “Is there, like, a dress code I need to follow?”

“No. We're not that kind of company. We'll go through all this tomorrow.”

“Oh, right.” she writes down a phone number. “Call me if I'm not here when I should be. I'm such a ditz I'll probably forget.”

“I'm sure it will be fine. See you tomorrow.”

“Ok. Love you. Bye.” she bounces out of the room.

“So...”

“So we'd best get those ground rules ready. Hemmings will find a way round them, but no reason to make it easy for him.”

The next day, “Do you know what this meeting is about?”

“No. I mean, if there's a God it's about canning Hemmings but I'm not that lucky.”

“Probably not. You can't prove it was him.”

“No. But it was.”

“Quite.”

“You are far too reasonable, Hank.”

“Office-drama holds no appeal for me.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“Ok, everyone here? No Hemmings? What a surprise. Fine, he'll get the news when he gets here.” she puts her lower two hands on the table, leaning forward a little. “Ok, I know you've been wondering what this is all about. So, we've got our test subjects. The lab mice have arrived. Could have been better timed with the hitches in production...”

“Hemmings.”

“...but we've got plenty still to do. Also, an advanced lab rat has joined us. Sindi Jacobs is...”

“Incorrect.” a flat voice comes from the doorway, “This Drone is joining the team.” They all turn. Drone walks into the room with Angelica just beside her. Her face is expressionless, her head

scooped out from behind her blank eyes, a slope leading down to her ears from her forehead. “Sindi Jacobs is a person. This Drone is designated property of LimbAway for purposes of testing.”

“I thought we were down on the whole drone thing?”

“We are...This is a...special situation.”

“Special situation?”

“This Drone volunteered. It prefers to work as a drone. There is...greater clarity.”

“So, treat Drone right, people. She will be...”

“It. This Drone is an it.”

“It will be reporting in to us, so no funny business. Make sure Hemmings understands that bit. Now, get to work.”