

## LIMBAWAY 19: BOUNCING BACK

by Paul Watson

Monday morning in the lab, watching Angelica and Hemmings walk past the open door to Marcia's office. Sindi sits on one of the stools, staring down at her hands, twisting her fingers together.

"Ready to be Drone?"

"Um, about that..."

"Sindi? Are you ok?" Loretta asks, leaning over her, a pink wipe in her hand.

"I mean, I'm fine. No, really, I am. Honest Injun. But, something happened over the weekend and... I need to talk before I can be Drone. It's nothing bad. Really. But it happened and..."

"Ok, what happened?"

Saturday night, Sindi sits at a booth, bending her fingers back and back, giggling. "Boing. Boing." she twists her hand, feeling her arm twisting. "Ooooh. No, wait, this is important. They've been trying to figure out what mixing the...thingies does and I know. I need to make notes. That's it, that's what they'd do, make notes, measurements, data." She looks around, but while there are plenty of glasses on the table, all empty, there's no paper. "That's no good. Oh, wait, napkins! Those are paper. I'll ask at the bar. Oh, and for a pen. Do they have pens in bars? They must do, right?" She weaves to the bar and sways triumphantly back, a black biro and stack of red napkins in her grip. "Right. So, first, uhm, what was first? Come on, brain. They explained this." She presses the heel of her fist into her temple, "First, first, first, first, oh, got it, outline what you're doing. Ex-peri-mental pro-to-col. Yes." she starts trying to write on the napkins, the soft paper proving frustratingly averse to collecting her thoughts, and the flashing lights and loud music doesn't help her concentrate.

Several crumpled napkins later, she's making progress, outlining what she's doing, what's happening, she can't remember what concentration it was, but she's sure Hank will know that. Drone would know, obviously. Drone remembers everything. Someone stands in her light. Her lips purse as she looks up, annoyed.

"Hey, Sindi, how's my favourite party girl?" he smiles down at her, teeth gleaming in the flashing lights, his black hair swept back.

"Tony!" she squeals, "I haven't seen you in aaaaaages. I thought you'd forgotten about me."

"Forget you? Never."

"Awww, you're so sweet."

"What say you and me go somewhere else? Maybe get reacquainted?"

"Oh, that would be lovely. But..." she gestures at the napkins, "I'm kinda right in the middle of something and..."

"You? In the middle of something?"

"Don't laugh. I'm working. I am!!"

"Ok, Sindi, that's pretty funny but..."

"I am. And if you're going to laugh at me, I don't wanna go anywhere with you."

"Ok, ok." he holds up his hands, "How about you scoot over and I help you out?"

"Oh, would you? That would be great. It's soooo much harder than it looks to get all the thingies right. I'm thinking as hard as I can but it just keeps going poof in my head, just when I've got it." she moves deeper into the booth. Tony slides in beside her.

"Sure thing, baby. So, what are you doing?" he picks up one of the napkins.

"Ok, you see, that's my finger, there, you see, not that I can draw, but it's close enough right? And this is how far it bends now. And this is... Tony, stop that! I'm trying to to do something useful here." she tries to shrug him away as he leans in, gently blowing on her ear.

"Don't you like that? You always used to."

Sindi squirms, "I doooooooo." she coos, "But I'm trying to worrrrrrk!"

"You can do that later."

"I'll forget. You know what I'm like. I need to do it now. Stop it." she slaps the hand creeping up

her thigh.

"Your lips say 'no', Sindi, but your body says 'yes'." He presses his lips against her neck.

"Tonyyyyyy." she whines.

"If you don't want me to do you, how about you lean down and do me? You always love that."

Sindi licks her lips, "I...I...I can't. I need to get this done before I can blow you."

Tony's grip on her shoulders tightens. "It can wait. I'll remember for you." He starts to pull her down into his lap.

"Tony! I caaaaaan't!!"

"Sure you can." he pulls a little harder.

Sindi's face goes blank, pulling back.

"This d...I made myself quite clear. I have things to do and have no time to engage in oral intercourse with you."

"Oral intercourse?"

"That is what you intended, was it not?"

"Since when do you even know how to say intercourse, never mind understand what the word means?"

"Sindi is far smarter than you think she is. Also than she thinks she is. That is irrelevant. You have been asked to stop. You have not. Stop. Or I will have to stop you."

"Stop me? You? Sindi, baby, you are having a laugh. You couldn't punch your way out of a wet paper bag. Now stop this nonsense and put out like a good girl."

"No. Remove your hand."

"And if I don't?"

"This Drone would prefer it if you did."

"And I would prefer it if I didn't. So, what are you going to do about it?" Drone grips his finger over its shoulder. It bends it back until he cries in pain. "Owwww! what the? What are you doing, you crazy bitch?!"

"Remove your hand from my shoulder. Or this Drone will be forced to injure you."

"Bitch." he slaps her. Drone's head whips around, its neck stretching before it bounces back. Tony's rings leave divots in her cheek that slowly fill in. "Now, be a good girl, or you get..."

Drone shoves its hand into his open mouth, the limb swelling inside, pushing to fill his mouth out.

"No. You will leave. Now. You will leave Sindi alone." the hand stretches further out, "If you do not, this Drone will repeat this until your jaw breaks. Or perhaps it will stretch its fingers down your throat and choke you from the inside. Or it might stretch into your ear and burrow through to your brain. This Drone understands that the human body is remarkably easy to damage." Tony's eyes bulge, his hands tugging on an arm that just stretches out to his desperate pulls. Drone releases its hand, pulling back from his face as he gasps for breath. "This Drone trusts its message is clear."

One eyebrow arches.

Tony scrambles back, gasping for breath, staring at her before he flees.

Sindi shakes her head, staring down at her hand.

Now, "...so, you see what happened. I don't wanna go to prison." she finishes, still on the verge of hyperventilating.

"Prison?"

"I hurt him. I could go to prison. That's what happens to people who hurt others, right? I don't wanna go there. I've seen the TV shows. I wouldn't last a minute, I'd be stabbed, no, stabbed is outside prison, inside it's shinked, shunked, shanked, that's it, I'd be shanked. And..." she stops, her face emptying, "This Drone believes it can explain."

"Drone? But...how?"

"This Drone is Sindi, Sindi is this Drone. We are both. Sindi was overwhelmed. She believed she could not cope. She believes this Drone is more competent than her. That she is incorrect is irrelevant. She needed someone to protect her. This Drone did so. From this Drone's understanding, it is acceptable to use significant force in the process of protecting yourself."

"So you're Sindi's alter?"

"This Drone is Drone. It belongs to Sindi's body as much as Sindi does, but Sindi's mind is wholly Sindi's. This Drone does not have a brain, after all. Sindi believes this Drone does not feel emotions, including fear, thus it is better equipped to deal with situations Sindi cannot handle. Which is why Sindi requested its presence as she did just now."

"Ooooookay."

Drone's face changes, "That is so freaky! I can be Drone? Any time I want? Why would I ever want to be me? Drone is smarter than me; she's stronger; she can focus for more than five seconds; she doesn't get drunk and suck off Tony or his friends just because she's asked; she's just better than me. Why would I, why would anyone, want me when they can have her? Drone might as well replace me. Everyone would be better off."

"Don't be silly."

Sindi sobs, "See? Drone isn't silly!"

"She isn't a full person, either."

Sindi sniffles, "I guess?"

"And she didn't discover what happens when you mix LimbUp and Down. Did she?"

"I guess not. But..." she pulls out the handful of red napkins, "She'd do a much better job with it. Look at it! This isn't useful. It's just a silly girl playing at being smart."

"Oh, sweetie, why don't we go talk to Hank? He'll be pleased to know what it does."

"Will he? Won't he want Drone to do it? I'm supposed to be Drone when I'm here. I should be Drone..."

"Let's see what Hank has to say about that."

Later, Sindi is demonstrating what happens. "...like I can't stretch, but I can be stretched?" she tries to demonstrate, her arm pulling back in like rubber as soon as its released, "But Drone could..."

"So we've invented Gingold?" Loretta asks.

"Gingold?"

"Doesn't matter, Hank. Pop culture reference."

"I don't get it." Sindi looks confused.

"Drone can probably do it because of how flexible it's self-image is, like how it can do animals much easier than a person can. Maybe we can try the hypnosis trick Jenny's working on? I can see a market for a super-yoga potion."

"Did someone mention my name?" Jennifer asks, a tiger's head where hers should be, the voice coming from a more human mouth in her clavicle. "If so, I can confirm it works."

"What's with the two mouths?"

"Animal mouths aren't designed for talking. If we're going to let people do this kind of thing, we can't reduce them to growls and hisses."

"Right. Still, it's good to know we can..."

The doors swing open. Angelica walks in, her hair substantially ruffled, a robe pulled around her. She drops a phallus on the desk. "Can someone turn him back? He's no fucking use to anyone like this. And make sure you tell him I said that." she turns and stops, "Oh, and then tell him he is still absolutely fired." she turns away again, "Oh, also, tell him if he causes me any trouble ever again, no one will ever see him after that." she finally finishes all her points and leaves.

Jennifer stares down at the member.

"Jennifer, are you ok?"

She looks up, "I'm fine, I'm fine. She's right, isn't she? He is no use to anyone, like this or otherwise." she sighs, "I'll take him home and deal with it."