

LIMBAWAY 20: DOUBLE-HEADER

by Paul Watson

Cat Grant looks at her phone through her half-glasses as it pings a new message from 'Angel'. She sips at her strong coffee, blonde hair flowing down to the shoulders of her suit. 'Hey, bitch. Why r u asking Marcy qs? I'm LAs publicity gal'

She smiles, 'Hey yourself, bitch. 1. Marcy gets flustered when lying. You don't. 2. I figured she'd be working. Again, you don't. 3. Learn to type whole words like a grown up.'

The reply comes quickly, leading with a tongue-out emoji, 'Hurtful. How about we meet up for drinks and you can ask me?'

'Thought you'd never ask. Spencer's?'

'Sure. Lunch break?'

'I'll be there.' Cat goes back to her computer, pulling up her notes on the story.

At the LimbAway lab, "Hey, Sindi. Ready to be droned?" Jennifer asks.

"This Drone is already here. Sindi...refuses to take control. This Drone is...concerned by this behaviour."

"What do you mean Sindi refuses to take control?"

"This morning, this Drone awoke, not Sindi. Since then, this Drone has been trying to relinquish control of Sindi's body, but there is nothing replacing this Drone. Sindi will not take the control. Hence why this Drone is here."

"Can you communicate with...?"

"No. There is no mental communication. This Drone should know what Sindi knows but Sindi is...erecting barriers. This Drone does not know why Sindi is refusing to return to the real world. Which is also concerning."

"Indeed. But how do we talk to her?"

"This Drone does not know. This Drone would...appreciate help, if that is possible."

"We'd really need some way of talking to Sindi."

"This Drone understands. It would...prefer not to be fully droned while Sindi is like this."

"Sure. We can work with that."

Lunch time, Spencer's cocktail bar, Angelica and Cat air-kiss on both cheeks before settling into the booth, "So, what story are you writing?"

"You know what..."

"I know what you're writing about. I don't know what story you're telling. Is it new craze on campus? Brave girl beats up kidnappers? Start-up company's products put lives in danger?"

"Brave girl beats up kidnappers?"

"She's got the bruises to prove it, too."

"Nothing like that. Yet. A couple called me, Cassie and Cissie. Told me they'd been made a few inches high. Which is ridiculous, but they had photos. And they said it had been done by some company called LimbAway. I look you up and hey presto here we are. So would, LimbAway's public relations officer care to comment?"

"I can confirm that we were involved in that promotional event, yes."

"Wow, you really are going corporate."

Angelica shrugs, "Figure I might need to. So, my understanding of Saturday is: My subordinate wanted to run a promo event on what could be a product line. He arranged the event at the bar with himself and an intern. The people involved were volunteers."

Cat makes notes on her phone as Angel talks. "I wasn't suggesting otherwise."

"There was an altercation when some students got aggressive with the shrunken women. Dalia, the intern, stepped in and stopped things until the bar's security could get involved. No serious injuries. We're continuing the relationship with O'Shea's."

"That does sound like a better story. I'd need to talk to the people involved..."

"Well, how about you come to the office tomorrow and I'll let you talk to Dalia?"

"After you've prepped her."

"You could try getting in touch with her directly, but her mother is fierce."

"Don't you call your mother a dragon?"

Angelica shrugs, "So clearly I know what I'm talking about. And if you're in the office, maybe we can show you some more things you can write about."

"Ooooh, mysterious."

"Always bait the hook for a journalist with a bigger story."

Cat raises her glass, "To better bait."

In the lab, Drone is working normally, despite having a brain, "I've got an idea." Drone looks up as Jennifer approaches.

"This Drone is listening."

"We give you another head, for Sindi, so we can at least talk to her."

"This Drone thought protocols did not permit the creation of a second head."

"They don't."

"But you think this will help?"

"I don't think it will hurt. At worst, we can Away the second head."

"This Drone is unsure it can consent to this. It sees little alternative, though. And so it gives as much consent as it can give."

"Ok. Are you sure?"

"This Drone has said it accepts."

Jennifer pulls out some LimbPlus. "Ok. Let's get Sindi's head there so we can talk to her."

"Where?"

"Shoulder?"

"It seems unlikely that another head would fit through this Drone's t-shirt." and so it pulls its shirt off, sitting calmly in its bra. "This Drone is ready."

"It's a good thing Brad isn't around."

"Yes. This Drone agrees." it tilts, its head raising its left shoulder a little.

"Ok. Here goes nothing." she rubs the blue gel over the shoulder, marvelling despite herself as a head and neck emerges, growing out of the shoulder. The second head blinks.

"Nononononono."

"Sindi, it's ok. It's ok, deep breaths."

"Why did you do that? I don't deserve to be here! I'm useless! I'm worthless! You need Drone not me! Just let me go!" she reaches for a nearby pot of LimbAway but her arm stops.

"This Drone will not permit that."

Sindi tries to turn her head, bumping her nose against Drone's cheek. "Oh, wow, you've got me and Drone? That's super cool, but you should just Away me again and not bring me back."

"We can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Your contract specifically says..."

"Oh, fuck my contract. You can rewrite it so you can Away me for good and I'll sign it. I just..."

"This is incorrect."

"What..." she turns her head, bumping into Drone again, "...ok, this is going to be annoying."

"Regardless of the legal issues that will arise from such a contract, no one in this facility would voluntarily erase Sindi. And if they would, this Drone will not permit such a contract to be signed."

"But whyyyy?!" Sindi wails, "You're, like, a better me! Everyone would be better off if you just..." her hand clamps over her mouth.

"Also incorrect." Drone looks up. "Jennifer, would you please Away this Drone's head and then restore it here." she taps her other shoulder. "That will at least permit Sindi to turn her head so she can communicate better."

"Are you sure?"

Sindi mumbles something around the hand. Drone nods. Jennifer rubs the pink gel over Drone's head and Sindi's face goes blank. Drone sighs. "This Drone was afraid of that. Please restore Sindi's head on the opposite shoulder."

"No faaaaiiiiiir!!!" Sindi protests as she's restored. "Why are you trying to stop me?! You could have a real life! A better life! Without me and my stupid brain messing it all up!"

"Also incorrect."

"Stop saying everything I say is incorrect!! I know I'm stupid! And silly! And worthless! Why are you resisting this?! You're supposed to just do what you're told! Why are you not doing what you're told?! You're a mindless drone! Not a real person!! I am! So you should just do what I..."

"That is precisely why." Drone replies evenly, "Sindi is a real person. This Drone is, at best, a limited copy. And it will not permit harm to come to Sindi."

"But...but...you're smarter than me!"

"Incorr..."

"Stop saying that!!!"

"This Drone has no ability Sindi does not."

"But you can...I can't..."

"Sindi has too many thoughts, tumbling, crowding, clamouring in her head at all times. This Drone has the benefit of mental silence to focus on one at a time. That is the only benefit this Drone may claim."

"But..."

"Also, it is irrelevant. Even if Sindi's claim was correct and Drone was her superior, it would not justify erasing Sindi in favour of this Drone."

"But..."

"Would Sindi allow Drone to erase anyone who is less intelligent than it?"

"What?! Of course not! That would be horrible! That would be...murder. I mean, wouldn't it? It would be, right?"

"Exactly. Erasing Sindi would also be murder as Drone is not Sindi."

"But I'm..."

Jennifer cups Sindi's chin, "Oh, sweetie, you're not useless. Brad was, and he was way smarter than you. It's not brains that make you important. It's..."

"Oh, sure, you say that. You're smart as well as pretty. I'm not smart, ok! I know that! But when I'm Drone I can at least do things! I was better off when I was just a ditzzy silly airhead that gave great head and that was all I was or could be. Before I knew I could be something more than that! Before I knew I could do something that mattered! Something important! But I can't do any of that as Sindi, that's Drone! So why can't you just let me go away and leave Drone to do my life better?!"

"I'm not interrupting, am I?" Angelica asks.

"Yes. Definitely. What do you need?" Jennifer asks, tearing her eyes away from Drone.

"Dalia. Maybe Loretta. Unless you'd rather talk to a journalist?"

"What? Me? No, no, definitely not."

"Sure?"

"Very, very, very sure."

"Ok. Just let them know I want to see them. And you can go back to...whatever this is."

The door swings closed, and swings open again as Loretta enters. Jennifer sighs, 'Hi, Lori. Angel's looking for you. Something about a journalist.'

"A what?"

"Journalist."

"Oh, god..."

"Rather you than me."

"Ok." she looks over at Sindi-Drone. "That's a new look for you."

Sindi giggles despite herself.

"This Drone thanks you."

"Could start a new fashion trend. Jenn, can I borrow you for literally one minute?"

"Will you be ok?"

"I guess. It's not like I can do anything bad. Drone will just stop me."

"This Drone will be fine."

"Ok, Lori. What can I do for you?"

Loretta guides her away from Drone. "Just one thing. Those samples you took from Brad's apartment when you got him home. There was a LimbAway pot missing."

"Missing?"

"There were more LimbAhoy pots than LimbAway"

"Really? Well, I didn't exactly spend time searching for everything..."

"It's ok, Jenn. I'm not going to turn you in. I'm just letting you know that it's all back in the inventory so no one will be able to find out."

Jennifer pauses, "Thank you." she whispers.

Loretta squeezes her hand. "I'd best go and see what the boss wants."

"Yes." she turns back to Sindi-Drone. "So, how are you two doing?"

In the executive office at LimbAway, aka Marcy's office, the aforementioned executive is pinching the bridge of her nose with one hand, "So, in response to Cat Grant asking questions that indicate she has no idea what a mess Hemmings made, you just up and gifted her a story that makes us look bad?"

"When you put it like that, it does sound bad."

"And tomorrow she's coming here."

"Yeah, I'm going to get her to talk to Dalia, maybe Loretta, so we can spin the body shops up as a better story."

"That doesn't sound too bad. But she's not a business journalist. So is that really a better hook for her than 'weird science run amok'?"

"Marcy, trust me. I know what I'm...oh."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, I've just had the most wonderful, awful idea. Big enough to smother anything."

"Which is?"

"I need to talk to the Dragon."