

Ready, Sette, Go!

by Moczso

Sette of the Numbers has been released from prison early for model behavior. With no other reasonable mission objectives, she does the only logical thing: move into the Nakajima house, and attempt to integrate into society. Key word being, 'attempt'.
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Chapter 1

Author's Note: Yes, I am aware that I already have like, three huge stories going! Hopefully this one won't be that long. It isn't planned to be more than five or so chapters at the longest.

Done as a request for Nanya. Hi, Nanya!

Chapter One:

Per the order of the Mid-Childan Central Penetentiary System Parole Board, this unit (Scaglietti Model Cyborg, Numbers Class, Designate Sette) was released from incarceration on the date of Friday, February 13, Mid Calendar Year 083, at 1500 hours. Terms of Sentence reduced for model prisoner behavior.

I viewed this as an acceptable judgment; I had taken care to stringently follow all prison guidelines to the letter, including informing the warden of a structural flaw in another inmate's cell that might have allowed her to open her containment, leading to a breach in facility security. Several inmates attempted to assault me in the shower afterward as retribution; after confiscating their various makeshift weapons (forbidden under penal code 557-D), I delivered them to the infirmary to have their injuries treated (as specified in the stipulations regarding treatment of wounded inmates discussed in penal code 147-F).

However, as logical as this ruling was, I found that it left me with an uncertain future. Requesting permission to make a communication before leaving, I chose to consult the Doctor regarding future objectives.

"Ah, Sette," he said, his familiar visage filling the screen before me as he spoke from his own, significantly more isolated prison, "And how can I help you this fine... it is day, where you are? I find that having not seen the sun in so long, it's rather difficult to keep track."

"Doctor. This unit has achieved a reduced sentence, and will shortly be released into the public. Please define my current mission objectives."

"My dear... there are none. You are now free, to join your sisters on the outside, or to make your own way if you should choose to do so. I think that following my whims has taken enough of your life from you already, don't you? So go, Sette, and discover who you wish to be."

I considered this. "I wish to be Sette. All objectives cleared, mission complete."

Please provide my next assignment."

The Doctor chuckled slightly, shaking his head in a gesture I believed to represent amusement. "Ah, you always were one of the more interesting ones, weren't you? Very well... if it helps you come to terms with your situation, then the only order I have for you is to consider yourself free from any obligation you feel you have to me, and to go into the world and pursue the life you want to pursue." And with that, the Doctor turned to leave the small comm. hub, turning off his end of the link as he did so.

Ah.

Taking these orders into consideration, I took thirty-seven seconds to determine what sort of life I wanted to pursue.

Having determined that the life I wanted to pursue was one in which I was given less nebulous mission objectives, I proceeded with my visitation rights to see my incarcerated sisters. All three of them were command units, and had authority to provide me with a clear goal in the Doctor's place. Due to extenuating factors in my case, their sentences had always been longer than my own. I had offered them copies of the Prison Handbook, attempting to aid them in shortening their sentences by pointing out several areas in which they could improve their overall imprisonment efficiency. Quattro responded with several statements which I believe to have been insulting.

"Oh, Sette." Tre said, her tone indicating surprise. "Why are you back here? I thought you had been paroled early."

"Yes, that is true. However, I felt the need to first receive updated mission objectives from a command unit." I informed her.

Uno smiled softly. "Sette... I'm sure you already spoke to Doctor Scaglietti. He must have told you that he had no objectives for you."

"Yes, that is true. I believe imprisonment has adversely affected his mental state. After he failed to provide a properly structured assignment, I elected to consult the other command units to determine if any had an objective to assign me." I informed her.

Tre sighed, for unknown reasons. "Honestly. Obedience is all well and good, but this gets a little old... Sette. We have no objectives, and we have no missions for you. Nobody in these cells has any need or any right to order you to do anything. You are free."

Ah.

I considered this.

"As a free being, I therefore have the right to request that I be given orders." I said, satisfied with this logical conclusion.

Tre narrowed her eyes. "This is all your fault, you know." She said, the statement directed at the third occupied cell in the block.

"I just wanted to make her more efficient." Quattro said, her tone indicating annoyance or possibly indigestion. "It's not my fault the puppet can't think for herself."

"No, actually, it is." Tre said bluntly.

"I am able to think for myself." I said, because it was true. "I think for myself often. Recently, thought for myself that I should request I be given orders."

"Ugh, I forgot how annoying you can be." Quattro said in disgust, or possibly heartburn. I was quickly beginning to deduce that she was either unhappy for some reason, or had eaten something unpalatable. This would not be a problem if she ate a properly nutritious diet choosing a variety of foods from all food groups, readily available in the prison cafeteria (A full menu detailed in Penal Code 459-R). "Why don't you just get lost? Nobody here is interested in coddling you anymore."

"Quattro!" Uno said sharply. "Show a little courtesy to your younger sister, please."

"Why bother? She's leaving and we all know I never am. Why should I care what she thinks of me? She gets to go off live a happy life in the sun with the traitors while I rot in here; I think that cancels out the sting of any insult I can think of." Quattro said.

"I see." I said. "I should not have underestimated your keen tactical mind, Quattro."

"... wait, what?"

"I shall go to consult our sisters who chose outside rehabilitation. Cinque also has command authority over me, and as she has been dwelling in the outside world, it is possible that she has acquired tasks at hand that need to be cleared. Yes, this is an acceptable solution." I said, satisfied with my new course of action. "Thank you, Quattro. I owe you much for this suggestion. You are a good sister."

All three of my older sisters blinked several times without saying anything. Perhaps

the dry air in the cells was irritating their eyes; I would consult the warden before I left the complex to see if they could be provided with some sort of moisturizing solution.

"Er... whatever makes you happy, I guess. Good... good job, Quattro?" Tre said.

"Yeah," Quattro said in shock... or possibly nausea. "Whatever you say."

After leaving my sisters, I began acting on my new mission to acquire a new mission. I collected my few belongings from the prison storehouse (Penal Code 901-L), boarded the former prisoner's pro bono public transit to Cranagan on Midchilda (TSAB Transport Regulation 00918), and located the Nakajima Household where I had been informed Cinque and several of my other sisters were currently living (Cranagan Central Residence and Communication Directory, 'N' section).

It was roughly 0100 hours when I arrived at the address listed for Genya Nakajima, the man I understood to be responsible for the housing of my sisters. As I entered the property, I immediately began to take note of environmental factors, noticing several which I deemed possibly relevant to my new living situation. There was no visible flight combat simulator, which would hamper my training efforts. There appeared to be some sort of small humanoid creature in the garden, which I initially took for a new model of unison device, but which further study revealed to be some sort of wooden idol of an elderly gentleman. Still, it would have been an excellent site for a hidden surveillance device, and so I elected to check the inside for any sort of hidden equipment. I found none. I was not able to restore the statue to intact condition with the limited tools on hand.

Satisfied with this contribution to the security of the premises, I proceeded to the main door. I had, in the past, been told by my sisters that my manner was blunt and occasionally inconsiderate. Given that some of those living in this home would have little reason to welcome me warmly, I elected to begin my new residence in a considerate manner. Ringing the doorbell at this late hour would wake the entire household, and would be considered rude. I instead elected to be considerate and enter the building quietly and without disturbing anyone, as a show of good faith. I was able to accomplish this relatively easily by picking the lock on the front door and severing the power source for the on-site alarm system.

Yes, I thought in satisfaction. *This will clearly show all involved that I mean no harm.*

Once inside, I began studying the layout of the house. I restricted myself to the first floor, so as not to wake anyone sleeping upstairs, but was still able to determine several convenient escape routes in the event of common household dangers, such

as fire, gas leak, or berserk robots. I also noted a structure in the trees in the backyard, possibly intended as some sort of child's plaything. It appeared dilapidated from disuse, but with mild repair could potentially serve as an excellent sniper post. I elected to mention this to Dieci at the first opportunity.

I then found a comfortable chair, sat down, and waited.

Six hours later, I nodded in satisfaction. Yes, clandestine entry had been the correct choice. I had definitely been considerate, and would be praised upon detailing the successful infiltration to the inhabitants of this home. Initial objective complete.

Chapter 2

Author's Note: Hmmm... I keep finding good cut-off points for chapters. This fic might end up being like, ten shorter chapters instead of five longish ones. Not sure how I want to play this out. Depends on how much story I can fit into the next three.

Chapter Two:

Upon hearing the stirring of activity in the rooms upstairs, I briefly considered my options.

Most likely, one or more of the inhabitants of the house would soon be coming down the stairs. Probability would suggest that one of my sisters would be the most likely candidate for first arrival, based simply on the fact that they made up the majority of the household population. Were that the case, I would likely have no problems in pursuit of my next objective.

However, a risk had emerged. This structure was also the home of Genya Nakajima (Rank Major, Post Battalion 108, as of last update to his public personnel records, has refused three offered promotions in order to remain in command of a criminal investigation unit), and the occasional dwelling of his adopted daughters Ginga (Type Zero Cyborg, A rank mage) and Subaru (Type Zero Cyborg, AA rank mage, extremely loud) Nakajima. The latter two could be extremely dangerous should they perceive me as a threat, while the former was a man of advancing years and could potentially have serious health problems that could be exacerbated by the surprise of seeing me.

It occurred to me, then, that it would perhaps have been prudent to call and send word that I would be arriving, and that in the long run it would have been best to use my one gratis prison communique' to do this rather than consult the Doctor. I filed this information away in preparation for the next time I was incarcerated for several years.

Considering the situation, it would be wise to prepare some sort of contingency plan. A peace offering, perhaps, that would, when combined with my earlier consideration, prove that I was absolutely no threat to the denizens of the house.

Ten minutes later, I stared at the strange black thing in the frying pan and nodded. It did not resemble closely the image in the cookbook I had unearthed, but all the ingredients had been used and it should have the same basic structure. Yes, this should serve.

"Ugh, what smells like somebody died...?" said a new voice, as the first arrival entered the kitchen. Ah. Nove. Then my peace offering had been unnecessary. Still, better to prepare a weapon and not need it than need it and not prepare it. Nove could occasionally be hostile even to her allies, so it might still be of some use. Further, her actions indicated fatigue; she was rubbing her eyes, her hair was dishevelled, and her footsteps were unsteady. Yes, perhaps I should make the offer just in case her state had left her in a bad mood.

"Good morning, Nove. I have gathered ingredients and constructed pancakes." I said. Then, upon considering the pan in my hands, I added "Or, at this point, pancake. It is nutritious and possibly edible."

"Eh? Thanks, Sette, but before I do anything else I need some coffee." Nove said, beginning to root around through the refrigerator. "Ugh, are we out of cream again? How many times I gotta tell Wendi, if she uses up the last of something, put it on the grocery list?"

"I do not know how many times you gotta tell her." I said.

"Heh. Well, I'm pretty sure we're up to a billion and counting." Nove said, her head still in the refrigerator. "Sette, could you get under the counter and get out the coffeepot? We should make some before the others..."

At this point, Nove stopped in mid-sentence and pulled her head out of the cooling appliance to stare at me. She blinked several times (dry eyes again? Perhaps a version of pink eye that only targeted cyborgs. I should be cautious). She rubbed her eyes, as if to be certain they were still working, and continued to stare at me.

I stared back.

She continued staring.

I offered her the coffeepot. "Here." I said.

"Um... thanks..." She said, her tone indicating some level of emotional distress. "Um... Sette... just out of curiosity, would I happen to be still asleep?"

"No."

"You sure? 'Cause right this moment, I'm thinking that I see you. And that would be pretty good indication this is a dream."

"I don't think I am a dream." I said. "Though if I was a dream, would I know I was a

dream?" This was question worthy of consideration, and I resolved to research the matter later. If I was a dream, I should probably know about it.

Nove reached forward tentatively, and patted me on the shoulder a few times. She then poked my chest. She then pinched my cheeks.

"Please don't do that." I said, after this continued for nearly a full minute.

"S-sorry... just making sure." Nove said. "Um... Sette, not to put this the wrong way, but... well... why are you here?"

"I am no longer incarcerated." I said.

"Yeah, I was able to guess that based on the fact that you're in the room... what I meant is more along the lines... y'know, why are you *here*, in this house? It's just that nobody let you in, so it sorta seems like you broke in."

"I did not wish to wake anyone. This way was more considerate." I said firmly. It was true, after all.

"... suuuuuuuure. That still doesn't explain why you came here at night and committed great violence against some defenseless pancakes."

"Ah. Upon my parole, I determined I had several needs. The primary need was to determine my mission objective upon leaving the prison, to guide my future integration into society and prevent a loss of overall efficiency. The secondary need was a place to live."

"... your priorities haven't changed, I see." Nove said, with an expression that confused me. It seemed to have elements of both amusement and exasperation, which made little sense to me. "But if you just needed some place to crash, wouldn't the Saint Church have made more sense? Some of our sisters are there, too, and well... not that I'm sure dad wouldn't be happy to have you, but they do have a lot more space..."

"Ah. Well..." I began, hesitating slightly. How to put this delicately? "That is related to my first need. I required a command unit, one of my older sisters, to provide me with a mission, an overriding goal. And... there are only two of them who were not incarcerated with me, and given the choice between Cinque or... or *Sein*..."

Nove clasped her hand on my shoulder, her expression sympathetic. "You don't even have to finish that sentence." Nove said firmly. "You made the only decision anyone sane could make."

"Yes, I thought so." I agreed, glad that Nove could understand. I respected Sein in many ways, but in many other ways I found her... difficult. Particularly when bathing, it was best to make absolutely certain that she was nowhere in the vicinity. Her IS made this difficult, but it was worth the effort.

"But still, you probably should have called first, y'know?" Nove said. "I mean, I'm glad to see you, but not everyone here would be."

"Yes, I realized that belatedly. This is why I have constructed a pancake, as an offering of peace." I said, once again offering her my first completed creation. The first of many, if she would allow me to resume my efforts.

"... .. yeah." Nove said. "Look, follow me, okay? I'm sure you're welcome to stay here, but we'll need to sort some things out."

I followed my sister out of the kitchen and back into the living room, where she said, "Okay, I'm going to go take care of this situation for ya. You just sit in here until I come get you." She then gestured to the chair I had spent most of the night in, indicating I sit in it.

"Yes, I am capable of doing that." I said, knowing for a fact that I was able to perform to her expectations in this matter. I could, if necessary, remain seated in the chair in question for several hours without a noticable degradation of my capabilities.

"Now, our sisters will be happy to see you, but Ginga is staying over the night, and if she spots you before someone explains the situation, it could be trouble. So I need you to stay here until I bring everyone down to see you, all right?" Nove said, leaving me in the living room to head back upstairs.

It was a very good plan, in theory. Unfortunately, its effectiveness was diminished somewhat by the fact that Ginga Nakajima (Type Zero combat cyborg, Mage Rank A) had actually descended from the top floor and entered the kitchen to prepare her breakfast while Nove had been guiding me to the living room. And so when Nove went back upstairs, Sergeant Nakajima (Like her father, she had turned down several offered promotions in order to remain a field investigator) entered the room I was sitting in to determine whom she had heard speaking. Or I assume this to be the case, mind-reading is not within my capabilities.

Ginga Nakajima stared at me for some time. I got the impression that, unlike Nove, she was not doing so out of only disbelief.

"Hello." I said.

"Blitz Caliber!" She snapped, her Mage Device glowing brilliantly to clothe her in a Barrier Jacket... and importantly to my case, arm her.

This was a problem. My Inherent Equipment had not been returned to me after my release, for obvious reasons, and without my Boomerang Blades my IS was largely useless as well. I was more than capable of defending myself against most common threats, but Ginga was not only a Mage, but a Cyborg as well. Attempts to battle her without my weaponry would most likely result in me being quite severely beaten and ejected from the household.

"I don't know how you got out of prison, or how you got in here..." Ginga said, "But if you think I'll let you hurt even one member of my family, you've got another thing coming!" With only that warning, she charged, light gleaming around her Revolver Knuckle as the mechanisms spun rapidly, the weapon clearly poised to put me through a wall. I took the only defense I possibly could.

I raised both hands and said, "I surrender."

"Wh-ULF!" Ginga said. Evidently such an end to the 'encounter' had caught her somewhat off-guard, because she startled visibly... and, considering that she was moving at a considerable speed while on rollerblades, fell, skidding face-first along the floor until her momentum bled off. "Oooooowwwwwwww..." She said, face still firmly in the floor.

"... .. would you like a pancake?" I asked, not certain what else to say. "There is only one, because Nove would not let me finish, but it is potentially good."

Without removing her face from the floor, Ginga said, "Er... I realize I'm stretching here, but is there any chance this is a dream? Because I did just wake up, and this whole situation is awfully surreal..."

"I do not think so. At least, the odds that both you and Nove are dreaming the same thing would be quite unlikely." I offered. "Although I suppose I could be dreaming, but I did not fall asleep so that is doubtful."

"**What?**" Came a familiar shriek from upstairs, halting our brief conversation there. "**SetteSetteSetteSetteSette!**" Came Wendi's delighted squeals as she leapt... literally... down the stairs, stormed into the room, and wrapped me in a hug quite against my will. "**Sette!** It is you! Ooooooh, little sis, it's so good to see you again! It's been way, way too long, you never call, you never write, it's been ages! Nove just told me, she's waking up Cinque and Dieci right now, we're all going to sit down and have breakfast together like a family so welcome back!"

"Hello." I said, with a certain amount of difficulty. My lungs were having problems acquiring enough oxygen.

"Ah, I've missed that blank, understated expression of yours!" Wendi said in satisfaction. "... Ginga, what *are* you doing? Geez, playing on the floor when we have guests? What are you, five?"

"Are we sure this isn't a dream? Because I'd like it to be." Ginga said.

Chapter 3

Author's Note: Wow. Two chapters and already seventeen reviews and a rec on TV Tropes. I had *no idea* Sette would draw such an audience!

Sette: As the main character, my primary mission objective for the story was to acquire a significant viewing audience. Based on the size of the *Nanoha* fanbase and the general review frequency for said fanbase on this (highly inefficient) story-sharing site, I can state with reasonable confidence that all mission objectives have been achieved. You may end the story now, your efforts are no longer required.

Author: I haven't actually resolved anything yet, you know. Why would I end it now?

Sette: Judging by your other stories that focus on 'humor' (*Uninvited Guests*, Bleach fandom, has taken you far too long to finish; *Center Ring*, Nanoha Fandom, poorly conceived Alternate Universe setting; *Proper Equipment*, Nanoha fandom, written while hopped-up on cold medicine), I have determined that continued involvement in this story will be detrimental to both my health and my dignity. I therefore wish to request that it be discontinued.

Author: Request denied.

Sette: Understood. There *will* be repercussions for this. If not at my hands, than several of my more impulsive sisters will most likely be having words with you shortly.

Author: ... I would threaten you back, but frankly you're too adorable to get angry at.

Sette: Yes, that is true.

Author: Oh, and before I sign off I should mention that I'm dropping the Japanese pronouns, the nee-san and such. I was using them before in an effort to make Sette sound more formal, but they're very annoying and a few people have pointed out errors I repeatedly make with them, so I've decided they're really just not worth the effort.

Sette: Just one more sign that this story should be cut short.

Author: Watch it, kid. Cute only gets you so far.

Chapter Three:

"So she's out of prison legitimately? She just got released?" Ginga Nakajima asked, holding ice to her face in an effort to bring the swelling down. "Er... sorry, then. I... when I saw you in the living room, and nobody had told me you would be there, I... sorta assumed you'd broken out."

"Several of my sisters considered such. However, escape attempts are forbidden under Penal Code 001-A, quite literally the first rule in the book." I informed her. "Such a flagrant breach of regulations would have been an irreversible black mark on my record, and a serious blow to my overall efficiency rating for my mission at the time, 'Operation: Twenty-five years to Life in a Maximum Security Installation (Possibility of early parole extended due to extenuating circumstances in the accused's childhood)'."

"That... that wasn't actually a *mission* so much as a *punishment*..." Ginga Nakajima said. She sounded nervous for some reason. Possibly she wanted pancakes.

Wendi sighed. "Ah, I've missed this. Life just isn't the same without someone outlining in excruciating detail the proper operating procedure for using a toaster."

"You do have a tendency to press down on the toast button with 43% greater force than the design specifications recommend." I agreed. "It increases basic wear and tear on the unit, contributing to greater frequency of needed repairs. I will be certain to monitor usage during my stay here in an effort to prevent this."

Wendi smiled. "I missed you too, sis."

I blinked. "I did not say I missed you." And indeed, I had not. I was not averse to seeing Wendi again, but I had not thought of her often during the time I was incarcerated. I instead, being in prison, thought of prison-related topics, such as 'solitary confinement' and 'shankings'. I found the former very soothing, actually. The latter was best avoided, if only because once they had begun, stopping them often required severely wounding some of my fellow inmates, which resulted in a great deal of unneeded investigation into the situation that hampered overall imprisonment efficiency.

Paradoxically, my statement caused Wendi's smile to grow larger. "If you had, you wouldn't be Sette. Welcome home, little sis."

I considered this statement. If I had said that I missed Wendi, I would no longer be Sette? This made no sense. A simple statement could not feasibly change my identity in such a manner, unless said statement was made by me, requesting forms

to legally change my name. And further, why did the thought that my name might change make Wendi happy? Unless perhaps she thought I might also change her name, and was relieved that I had not? It would be rather disconcerting, after all. Deciding this was the most likely answer, I said, "Do not worry. I have no desire to change your name, and could not if I wanted to."

Wendi laughed out loud at Ginga Nakajima's confused expression. "Oh yeah, I definitely missed this!"

I blinked slowly. The years had not changed Wendi; she still did not make a great deal of sense.

"All right, here's the girl of the hour." Nove said, leading Cinque and Dieci into the kitchen where Wendi, Ginga Nakajima and I had gone to sit and have a light breakfast. For some reason, no-one was willing to attempt eating the pancake. Perhaps the household Weekly Breakfast Plan did not allow pancakes today (surely they had a weekly breakfast plan. Why wouldn't they plan out their breakfasts at least a week in advance? It allowed food to be acquired and prepared with minimal waste of time and resources). I supposed if it was not pancake day, the situation could not be helped.

Cinque sighed, closing her one eye, but smiled softly immediately afterward. "Well... I guess it's a bit troublesome that you didn't call first, but it is nice to see you again, Sette."

Dieci nodded, once. "Sette, it's been awhile." She said. "How are you? I imagine prison was stressful, so if you need anything..."

I considered this. "Not really." I said. "Prison was quiet, and easy to understand. I don't have any particularly negative memories of my time there. The first day featured several threats to our lives and persons, but after Tre killed that woman..."

"*What?*" Nove, Wendi, and Ginga Nakajima squeaked in unison.

"Ah, I should have mentioned. Tre said that the best option for earning respect in prison is to find the largest, most dangerous inmate you can and kill them. I chose not to do so, because it would be a flagrant violation of Penal Code 117-R, but Tre elected to pursue this path by hunting down and efficiently killing a very large murderer with considerable influence over most of the the other prisoners. This action extended Tre's sentence by several decades, but afterward only new arrivals unaware of the so-called 'pecking order' would actively seek conflict with her or any of the rest of us, so it could still be called a successful mission." I said.

For some reason, nobody spoke for some time after this. Perhaps they had forgotten what the Weekly Breakfast Plan said, and were trying to recall what their assigned meal for the morning was.

"So... Sette." Nove said, after some time had passed. Ah, good, breakfast was back on schedule. "What are you going to do now that you're out?"

"That is what I am here to determine. Cinque, I await your orders." I said.

"... me?" Cinque said.

"Yes, you."

"Er... I know that I used to outrank you, but... you're not a combatant anymore, Sette. You don't need to take orders from me."

"Untrue." I stated. "The Doctor gave me an assignment earlier, stating, as follows: 'go into the world and pursue the life you want to pursue'. I have completed two objectives. I have gone into the world, as evidenced by the fact that I am here, in the world. I have determined the sort of life I wish to pursue, which is a properly structured existence wherein my abilities are utilized to their maximum efficiency by a competent superior. All that remains now is to pursue this 'life', which will be accomplished by placing myself under your command, Cinque."

"Sette..." Cinque said, smiling slightly yet paradoxically also appearing sad. "I'm flattered that you think of me like that, but I'm really in no position to be your 'superior'. I'd rather just be your sister, and let you determine your own 'objectives'."

I considered this. Fortunately, I had gotten very good at logic puzzles of this sort, and was able to outmaneuver her. "I have assigned myself an objective. This objective is: request Cinque assign me further objectives. Cinque, please assign me a new mission to complete. Primary Objective completed, awaiting new mission."

Cinque sighed. "You know, for the ultimate doormat you're surprisingly stubborn when you want to be..."

"I do not want to be stubborn. However, since my talents are currently going to waste, it is essential I determine my next mission immediately. Each passing hour brings further drops in efficiency and productive output." I informed her.

"Cinque..." Dieci interjected. "Maybe asking Sette to just take over her own life completely is a bit much to ask so suddenly. It took Otto and Deed awhile to adapt, and they had much less of Quattro's tampering to deal with."

"That's... a fair point." Cinque said. "All right, how's this? Sette, I'll take over as your 'commander' on a probationary status, but for now my only command to you is to explore civilian life, find things you enjoy, determine what you want to do. I'll offer you 'objectives'... well, more like suggestions, but you can follow them as ardently or as little as you want to. And eventually, with any luck, you'll find out what you want to do, what you don't want to do, and someday you'll be able to adapt to the degree the rest of us have and you won't need me to make those decisions for you anymore. Is that acceptable?"

In truth, I would have preferred a more concrete arrangement, but I found this mission to be vastly preferable to no mission at all. Certainly, once I performed flawlessly to her expectations, Cinque would see my value as a subordinate and return me to her command on a more permanent basis. "Yes, this will be acceptable. Mission acknowledged."

Cinque nodded. "Good. And the rest of you, I'd like to ask that you help out as much as possible. Take Sette to new places, introduce her to new people and experiences. Basically, help her have a life until she builds one of her own. This won't be a problem, I assume?"

"Well... I have my job to do, but I'll help as much as I can." Ginga Nakajima said.

"Anything for family!" Wendi cheered.

"Certainly. And I'm sure some of our sisters at the Church would be happy to help too." Dieci said.

"Except Sein. We should avoid Sein." Nove said.

"That's why I said 'some' of our sisters, not 'all' of them." Dieci agreed. "We want to integrate the girl, not traumatize her."

"I have learned to confirm the security of a 1600 meter radius before entering a bath." I said.

Nove smiled. "Smart girl. You'll go far in this world."

Genya Nakajima (Rank Major, Post Battalion 108) entered the room, dressed in a bathrobe and pajamas. In his hands he carried what appeared to be a newspaper and several scraps of wood. "Ah. This would be the sister I've heard about, then?"

"Mmm-hmm!" Wendi said cheerfully. "Sette's moving in! That's all right, isn't it daddy?"

Genya sighed. "Well... I suppose that once you hit a certain amount of daughters, adding one more doesn't make a huge difference. I do have a few things to make sure of, first. For starters... well, I hate to say this, but she didn't choose reintegration like you girls. Are you sure she's... safe?"

"I am currently not under any orders to kill you." I said helpfully. This would reassure him, I felt.

For some reason, the room again fell silent.

"D-don't worry, father." Cinque said, somewhat shakily. "She's a bit socially awkward, but she won't hurt anyone who doesn't try to hurt her first, at least not unless I tell her to. Isn't that right, Sette? You are only to use violence against any living thing in self-defense, and take all possible precautions to avoid taking a human life. Understood?"

I nodded. Finally, an order. Hopefully, the first of many. "Understood, sir. Rewriting defensive parameters to utilize this new information."

"There, see? Harmless." Nove said.

"Okay." Genya said, somewhat doubtfully. "Less dramatic, but just as important, have you decided where she'll be sleeping? We're running low on rooms."

"Oh! Oh! My room! My room! She can stay with me!" Wendi said.

"Oh. Oh. Acceptable. Acceptable. I can stay with Wendi." I said. Wendi seemed to be fitting in well here, and perhaps imitating her speech patterns would speed integration.

"Well, now that we've settled that, I suppose I do have one more thing to be certain about." Genya Nakajima said, depositing the wooden shards he was carrying. Upon closer inspection, one of the larger pieces carried the representation of the face of an elderly gentleman. "Young lady, is there some reason you felt our garden gnome deserved to die? Because if other lawn decorations are going to enrage you similarly, I'll save some money and just leave the yard bare."

"She killed Mr. McGnome?" Wendi asked. "Okay, even I gotta ask on this one... why?"

"I was checking it for covert listening devices." I informed the room. I did not wish to appear randomly destructive, after all. "I was able to determine that there were none."

"Ah. How helpful. I never would have thought to do that." Genya Nakajima said in a strangely dull tone.

"Yes, not many people would have." I agreed. "You are fortunate I was able to anticipate and defend against that avenue of infiltration."

"... yeah. Sure." Genya Nakajima said.

And with this obviously wholehearted confirmation that my actions were correct, it became clear that my cohabitation in the Nakajima household was off to an excellent start.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4:

As of 1100 Hours, Mid-standard time, I prepared to commence Operation: 'Live A Normal Life and Hopefully Eventually Chill Out and Stop Calling Everything an 'Operation' (Operation name chosen by Wendi).

I, my sisters, and Ginga Nakajima would tour the surrounding city, allowing me to, in Cinque's words, 'get the lay of the land' and 'learn where the major day-to-day spots are'. I considered exploration of the local environment to determine appropriate sniping positions, ambush points, and convenient visual shields for aerial combat to be of major importance, so I quickly agreed to this plan. Cinque informed me that by day-to-day spots she had actually meant places to buy food and clothing, or acquire other civilian services. I thought this odd; certainly I wouldn't need to buy clothing everyday, or at least not so often as I would need to face pursuers in HSLA air combat (Hi-speed-low-altitude, a style of urban aerial combat that focuses on rapid pursuit and maneuvering through the tight spaces of an obstacle-heavy environment i.e. a city or canyon, and thus can only be effectively managed by individuals capable of personal flight, allowing them to easily lose and ambush bulkier aerial vehicles. General Roculus Volvo's Tactical Training Manual, Chapter IV: 'Urban Warfare', and Chapter IX: 'Advanced Aerial Combat'. The first book I ever read.). Cinque informed me, somewhat nervously, that while living with them I would most likely not be engaging in combat regularly, or with luck, ever.

I assumed she meant 'with bad luck'; with no easy access to appropriately tuned simulators, live-fire combat was the only way to quickly regain the combat skills that had most likely atrophied during my incarceration. For some reason, the prison did not allow prisoners ready access to combat simulators. I had always been confused by this, as a substantial portion of the Penal Code... sections 100 through 500... covered prisoner interactions, and while prisoner/prisoner, prisoner/guard, and guard/guard combat were all forbidden except in cases of self-defense, combat simulation programs were not. They simply were not available, and all requests for access to a proper simulator denied, occasionally quite rudely. I was uncertain why the staff had a problem with me programming an exact duplicate of the prison structure to conduct a combat and structural analysis, and engage in hundreds of variable combat scenarios within it. It is not as though I could use this information to escape; that would have violated Penal Code 001-A.

A lack of opportunity to exercise my primary function notwithstanding, however, I could see the wisdom of knowing the most efficient places to gather supplies in the

local area. Being aware of supply cache locations would allow me to raid them for food and medicine before they were ransacked by panicking civilians in the event of a crisis, so this was an appropriate objective. However, it was a civilian objective, and I had no civilian clothing. My sisters seemed to be under the impression that my customary armored bodysuit was inappropriate, and so I would have to borrow proper civilian dress until I could acquire my own. Fortunately, my body type was sufficiently similar to most of the other women in the house that I had a variety of clothing to choose from. I found no appropriate body armor, but my own Numbers armor would serve perfectly in that regard and I could activate it instantly. Still, most of the clothing available was unacceptable for other reasons.

Too flashy; it would draw attention to me if I needed to seek cover.

Too loose; it would snag on obstacles or shrapnel.

Too confining; I did not know why Wendi possessed a full bodysuit consisting entirely of shiny black leather, but it was far too tight for any reasonable person. It would hamper movement and be extremely difficult to get in and out of quickly, requiring a full corset to keep the top on. The whip it came with would not even serve as an effective weapon, making it overall perhaps the most impractical piece of clothing I had ever seen.

Wendi made little sense to me.

Finally, however, I found an appropriate piece in Nove's closet. In terms of design, it was similar to a very efficient piece of clothing I had once seen and knew to be effective for high-speed high-agility combat; easy to move around in, form-fitting without being restricting, and in simple dark colors that would blend into the city well if I needed to hide. Actually, in that regard, it was superior to the original model. The original had been black, and most people did not realize that black was often not the best color for going unnoticed; it was too dark, darker than most natural surroundings. Dark grays and greens were better at blending with shadows in both urban and natural environments (General Roculus Volvo's Tactical Training Manual, Chapter XII: 'Basic Stealth Operations'), and this garment was in a very effective deep forest green that the human eye would most likely glaze over in sufficient darkness; I could take it off and use it as a hair cover after activating my armor to make me less visible overall. I donned this outfit and some footwear I found to be both comfortable and functional, and prepared to begin the mission.

Ginga Nakajima was the first to see me upon my descent, and she seemed somewhat confused. "I... I should ask, but I don't want to."

"Your statement is nonsensical. This mission has no classified details, so if you require any points clarified you should not hesitate to ask." I informed her. Accurate information flow was essential to any successful operation. Surely a soldier of her experience should know this?

"Um... okay. Why are you... wearing that?"

"This was the most efficient garment I could find. It is easy to move in, comfortable, leaves few openings to snare on obstacles or be grabbed by an attacker, and can be used to disguise my hair in the event of a stealth operation." I informed her. Should she not be aware of this from even simple observation? I knew from my last encounter with such a garment that Bureau training likely covered nearly everything I had mentioned, and her records indicated she was an exemplary soldier. Perhaps she was some kind of savant, only effective at direct combat with no understanding of other aspects of warfare. Not everyone could be as well-rounded as myself.

"... it's a bathing suit." Ginga Nakajima said finally.

"It is based on the combat uniform of Fate Testarossa Harlaown." I said with some relief. Perhaps she did comprehend the usefulness of this outfit, then, if only on the most basic of levels. She was an inferior soldier, then, but trainable. "Having seen first-hand the versatility of the design, I can easily see it also being useful for aquatic missions, yes."

"No, I mean that is literally a bathing suit. It's meant to be worn to the beach or the pool, not out shopping! And it is way too small for you, did you borrow that from Nove? You know she's much shorter than you, right? Isn't that uncomfortably tight?"

"It has many uses, so a beach excursion is quite possible. And the tightness prevents it from getting snagged." I agreed. Hadn't we already covered this? Perhaps she wasn't trainable after all.

Nove and Wendi chose that moment enter the room, the former saying, "Okay, Sette, you ready to..." before stopping, sighing loudly, and taking hold of my arm. "Come on, sweetie, we'll pick you out something that won't have half the street wondering if you're crazy and the other half staring at your ass...ets."

"My assets? I do not understand."

"... your legs."

"Ah. My legs are exposed and unencumbered." I said helpfully. "It helps limit restriction of motion."

"Classic Sette!" Wendi said, laughing joyfully. "Man, this was so worth the death of Mr. McGnome."

"Don't tell Subaru that. She's gonna be heartbroken." Ginga Nakajima said dryly.

"Eh, I never understood what she saw in that thing. Always sitting around below skirt-level, I bet he was a total pervert. And he was always *smiling*. Like he was all smug about his gnome magic, living in a garden in a hollowed-out stump and talking with the moles all day. You know what? That little bastard had it coming, the way he judged me all the time with his smirk and his probing eyes!" Wendi said. "You hear that, gnome? I'm *glad* Sette killed you, and you can rot in Hell!"

"Okay, first rule of acting like a normal person?" Nove said, pulling me upstairs to, for some reason, change me into far less efficient clothing. "Don't be like Wendi."

I found my new outfit to be acceptable, if painfully inferior to my original choice. The shirt was plain white and the jeans were blue, much less effective stealth colors, and they were slightly baggy which gave me a more vulnerable target silhouette and increased the danger of getting caught on a nearby obstacle. Still, if I was to successfully integrate into society I would eventually need to learn the (incomprehensible, pointless) customs, so I might as well begin now.

My sisters and Ginga Nakajima were quite enthusiastic in regards to showing me the local stores. Well, to be more specific, Wendi was extremely enthusiastic. Extremely.

"Oh, oh! Sette, look! This place has the best ice cream in the city, I'm not even kidding. Seriously, this ice cream is so good it would make you feel like you just got out of prison even if you hadn't just gotten out of prison!"

"Ooooh, Sette, *look*! Take a look at this belt, it would look just gorgeous on you! Cinque! We need to buy Sette this belt... what do you mean this is a skirt? I've seen handkerchiefs with more fabric than that, it wouldn't cover her legs at all... ... We should buy it anyway! I bet it would give our Prison-Sisters heart attacks if they saw you all dolled-up and sexy! Don't wear it around Sein, though."

"OOOOOOH, Sette, LOOK! Pet store, pet store! We should buy Sette a kitten! They always buy kittens for gorillas and stuff, and Sette's got sort of a gorilla vibe! ... No offense."

"**OOOOOOOOOH**, Sette, look, look, *look*! Toys! They have the hot new game I've been wanting for the PlayBox 7, 'Psychedelic Disco Murderfest Rally 3: Revenge of the Rebloodinator'! We can all play some versus mode when we get home, and I

totally call Sette for my team!"

It was... an exhausting day.

Still, I was able to achieve a working mental map of the viable food and supply depots in the vicinity of the Nakajima household, and worked out a number of paths that would allow me to quickly reach them in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster. I also spotted several possible sniper positions and informed Dieci of them as they came up.

She seemed to take the news with a certain amount of emotion. I am not certain which emotion, though I assumed joy at the knowledge that I was helping her locate excellent vantage points from which to acquire a good view of the enemy army while remaining hidden herself.

We stopped for lunch at a local restaurant with the... dubious name of 'Pizza Explosion' (chosen by Wendi. I began to wonder what, exactly, was Cinque's reasoning for allowing Wendi to make so many decisions). The interior of the restaurant was... just as loud as the name suggests.

"Look, Sette!" Wendi said, throwing an arm around my shoulders. "Y'see, they have pizza, and that's awesome, but they have all kinds of games and stuff to do while you wait too! Let's let the boring girls handle the food, while you and I pick out the bloodiest shoot-em-up here and kill the crap out of some stuff! Y'see those machines with the plastic guns there? They're like a target shooting game, only the targets are zombies and monsters and stuff! You'll love it!"

"Oh." I said, pleasantly surprised. "A sort of combat simulator. I see... I misjudged you, Wendi. This was an excellent idea."

"This was a terrible idea!" Nove said. "We're trying not to make her think about that stuff!"

"Hey, look at it this way," Wendi said with a grin. "We're trying to make sure she doesn't think of herself as a weapon, right? But nothing we can do will erase her combat training, and we need to accept that. So we'll shift those aggressive instincts to a socially acceptable venue: *shooting zombie heads off! Whoo-hoo!*"

"This is acceptable." I said, my faith in Wendi restored. "If it is socially acceptable and will aid in keeping my reflexes honed, I approve. I would not wish my combat instincts to become as dull as Ginga Nakajima's after all."

"What?" Ginga said. Ah... her instincts were so poor she didn't even realize how poor they were. Yes, I would have to take care to avoid degrading to her level.

"See, see?" Wendi asked cheerfully. "She wants to! Oh, what should we play, what should we play... 'Live-in Wickedness: The Parasol Stories'? 'Domicile of the Deceased'? 'Passed-on Getting Up'?"

"I would like..."

Wendi's finger shot out to point at something in the distance, her eyes wide with shock. "... *'Blood Zombies 2'!* I didn't even know it was out yet! Sette, Sette, we have to play that one!" She squealed.

"Oh, Hell..." Nove muttered.

"Wendi, we all remember what happened with 'Blood Zombies 1'." Cinque said gently. "You remember the fines? The three-month ban? We can't let you play that."

"Eh, oh that won't happen again, I'm sure! I hear they got rid of those little spider guys!" Wendi said cheerfully. "Besides, Sette wants to play, don't you Sette?"

"I-" I began.

"See? She's chomping at the bit! Come on, let's go let's go let's GO!" Wendi... well, let us be perfectly honest, screamed, dragging me behind her as she sprinted toward the machine.

"We should have left Wendi at home." Nove said. Oddly, I did not hear anyone voice disagreement with this sentiment. They must have already finished their daily combat training.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5:

In order to fully comprehend the events that followed, it was necessary to have a basic understanding of the hit Midchildan Arcade Shooter franchise, 'Blood Zombies'. I know that even with this knowledge, I still have difficulty comprehending exactly what occurred.

Created in Mid calendar year 52 by a small, privately owned company called 'Ecliptic Electronics', the original 'Blood Zombies' was a low-budget piece, to be generous. To be less generous, it was programmed by four men in a garage, it just happened to be four men who called themselves a 'company'. 'Blood Zombies' was created using technology equal to 'whatever they could find' and a budget of 'whatever they could scrounge'. As a result, the release was a shoddy product, vastly behind the times; 2-D graphics, non-learning AI, a story that was essentially nonexistent because no writer was hired. Despite this, 'Blood Zombies' quickly became a cult classic among serious gamers due to one thing it did have; brutal, unrelenting difficulty. All enemy characters moved quickly and randomly, and could only be destroyed by targeting a very specific and very small area that differed on each enemy sprite; ranging from the heads of the titular zombies to certain enemies with weak spots only a pixel or two in width. Further, the enemies tended to appear in large numbers, and did far more damage to the player than in other, similar games. Being merely proficient in 'Blood Zombies' was considered a badge of honor. Being skilled enough to beat the game was enough to make many gamers minor celebrities in their local arcades; free tokens or prizes, photos on the wall, and other such honors. Having at least one 'Blood Zombies' machine became not merely hoped for in all major arcades, but expected.

This unexpected success was sufficient to propel Ecliptic Electronics to status as a legitimate business, if a small one. Excellent sales of the more polished but equally difficult home console version pushed them further. And so, seeking to take advantage of this success, they began work on a sequel that would cement their position as a major entertainment company. 'Blood Zombies 2' was, in every way, superior to the original. The graphics were cutting edge, the story was surprisingly detailed for a work primarily revolving around a gameplay mechanic of shooting zombies until they ran out of blood, and the AI was now able to study the players as they progressed and conceive of plans to counter them.

And, of course, the famous difficulty was only enhanced by this, despite what Wendi seemed to believe. This will become important later in the report. I have here used

what is called 'foreshadowing', or the use of current events to imply future ones.

At the time, of course, I knew none of this. I was merely satisfied that a combat simulator had finally been provided. It appeared to be geared toward long-range shooting combat, which was a specialty of mine (though I used thrown bladed projectiles rather than firearms, as the simulator provided), which I doubly approved of. The targets were somewhat abnormal, but I supposed it was largely irrelevant if this helped me get my long-range reflexes back.

I analyzed my weapon, considering the combat potential. According to the instructions ('Blood Zombies 2 Arcade Edition, Gameplay Instructions'), the weapon could fire six consecutive shots before requiring a recharge, which was accomplished by pointing the weapon off-screen and pressing the firing trigger. This was not terribly realistic, but then this appeared to be a sort of civilian system for amateur marksmen. I supposed realism was secondary to improving basic skill and reflexes.

I lined up six shots, and felled six targets. The targets were rapidly moving and somewhat small, but my reflexes were honed in genuine combat. I was quite used to making precision attacks on fast-moving targets, and eliminated one target with each round. One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill...

"Wow, you're good at this!" Wendi said. "How do you always get the... *what do you mean he bit me?*"

One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill.

"Gah! Where did that spider thing come from? What the... zombie bees? Where the Hell did they get zombie *bees?*"

One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill.

"Oh, come on there's no way you can be hitting... what the #\$(*&, zombie *pigs* now? Where the #\$\$^#%\$ did those #*%&^#\$\$* things come from?" Wendi screamed, loading a new token into her side of the simulator.

One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill.

"H-how do you keep track of all the little... GAAAAAH! #*#\$\$&^#! Where did he come from? I just came back to life and I'm already dead again!" Wendi snapped, adding in another admission token.

One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill.

"Sette! Sette! Shoot this one he's got a chainsaw and...

##*&\$^*&^*&\$^!\$%&\$%&^!" Wendi said. I had never heard many of these words she was using before, and logged them for future analysis. She added another token.

One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill.

"You're cheating." Wendi said darkly. "This game is cheating. Everyone is cheating. Well, I won't let this game kill me, and I won't let my frickin' little sister out-score me, and I woSON OF A BITCH, WHAT THE #&\$ DO YOU MEAN THERE ARE ZOMBIE PIRANHAS IN THE PUDDLES? THERE ISN'T ENOUGH ROOM FOR FISH IN THERE!" Wendi said.

One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill.

"THAT'S IT. SCREW THIS GAME." Wendi snarled, laying one hand on the simulator console.

One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill. One shot, one kill.

The machine began to glow. Wendi snapped her fingers.

And I learned, first-hand, exactly how and why Wendi had been temporarily banned from the establishment upon playing the original 'Blood Zombies'.

I wondered, vaguely, if the restaurant was called 'Pizza Explosion' because Wendi ate there often?

As we left the establishment, passing the arriving fire crews, my sisters and Ginga Nakajima appeared distraught. Wendi had been banned from 'Pizza Explosion' again, this time for the remainder of her natural life. Further, our meals had not yet arrived when Wendi detonated the arcade floor and prompted management to remove us from the premises. As a result, morale among the group was low in general.

"My scores were excellent. However, I do not believe that device's memory system survived, and therefore it will be impossible to compare to existing scores to determine my placement." I said, imparting positive information in an attempt to 'lighten' the mood.

"I... I think that was a lot of fun too." Wendi said. "Like... so much fun, we should just... keep going. Let's just keep having... lots of fun."

"We are going home." Cinque said. "We'll get something to eat there, where Sette can have a nice, calm meal in a family environment. And then we'll go back out again. Only this time, you'll be staying behind."

"Why? I wanna go out tooooooo!"

"Punishment. I thought that was obvious."

"B-but it was the game's fault! I didn't want to blow it up, I just..."

"Did the same damn thing you did last time? Got mad because you were losing and blew up the game?" Nove asked.

"N-no, I..."

"You do know that when I'm involved in incidents like this, my superiors hear about it, right? They'll find out I was at the scene." Ginga Nakajima said. "I take a day of leave to spend time with my new sister, and this happens. Poor Sette must be traumatized, and here comes a new black mark on my record..."

"It is all right. I am used to explosions in contained quarters." I said helpfully. "As to your other concerns, given my observations of your behavior thus far I have determined that you most likely have many black marks on your personnel records already. I doubt that another will seriously impede your career progression."

"... .." Ginga Nakajima said. She must have been considering the wisdom of my words. Her performance was largely sub-par in most military matters, but she seemed to take instruction well. With time, effort, and leading by example, I could, perhaps, eventually mold her into a passable soldier. As the Nakajima family were not charging me any rent for my room and board, this would be an acceptable method of repaying them, I felt.

"... right. Sette, remind me that after we finish accustoming you to your surroundings, our second lesson for you should be 'tact'." Cinque said.

"Understood. New mission confirmed, to commence upon completion of current objectives." I said. I was quite pleased; as expected, Cinque had seen the value of my presence and continued to provide suitable objectives.

"... Yes. Well. That's... great. In any event... Wendi, all you had to do was behave, and you couldn't. So it's home with you."

"She cheated! Just like Dieci cheated last time!" Wendi whined.

"I didn't cheat! I'm just a good shot!" Dieci protested.

"All of my actions were within the parameters of the simulation. Further, I can state definitively that Dieci's marksmanship scores, as of last comparison, exceed my own by a combined average of 15.7%." I said. "Cinque, please confirm this analysis."

"Neither of them cheated. They're just better than you." Cinque said patiently.

"...Th-then that game cheated!" Wendi sniffled.

"It didn't cheat, you're just not any good at it!" Nove said.

"Your... your combat strategy does tend to favor large explosions rather than pinpoint accuracy." Dieci said.

"... I don't wanna go home." Wendi whimpered.

"Tough!" Ginga Nakajima said. I believe she had been looking forward to lunch.

"... .. Setteeeeeeee! They're picking on meeeeeeeeeee!" Wendi said.

"Oh. I see." I said. I could think of nothing further to add.

"... .. you are no help at all, Sette."

This concerned me briefly, until I recalled that none of my current mission objectives required giving Wendi aid.

After depositing Wendi at the Nakajima Residence, my remaining sisters, Ginga Nakajima, and I commenced our second bout of reconnaissance.

"So, now that we've dropped the dead weight..." Nove began.

"Nove, be nice." Cinque said.

"Sorry. Now that we've gotten rid of the one person most likely to ruin any excursion..."

"... when did I become den mother to a flock of children?" Cinque asked. I saw no children, so I assumed this to be some sort of play on words and not a statement that Cinque had begun a new career without noticing.

"... what do you want to do next, Sette?"

"My current mission objectives are complete. Local sites of interest have been found and inspected." I said. "I am currently awaiting Cinque's approval to commence my second mission, tentatively titled 'tact'."

"... so in other words, you're open." Nove said.

"Yes, that is true."

"You had something mind, Nove?" Ginga Nakajima asked.

"Well... Sette wanted to train herself, right?" Nove asked. "I'm feeling antsy too, and I haven't dropped by today, so... why don't we work out some of her naturally aggressive tendencies in a socially acceptable situation? How about we enroll her in my Strike Arts class?"

Cinque frowned slightly. "I'd prefer to avoid anything martial, Nove."

"With all due respect, Cinque, perhaps Nove has a point." Dieci said. "Combat is... well, all Sette understands."

"I also understand cooking." I said. They seemed to have forgotten my new-found skill with pancakes.

"... yes. Well, in any event, my point is that, maybe... it might not be a bad idea to sort of ease her out of that. Wendi was just screwing around as a way of getting Sette to shoot zombies with her, but she *did* have a point: a way to channel Sette's natural drives into a civilian channel might not be a bad way to begin weaning her off her military mindset." Dieci said.

Cinque considered this for a moment, before smiling slightly. "That's... not a bad point. Cold turkey rarely does any good, after all. All right, Nove, the ball's in your court."

"Whoo-hoo!" Nove said, pumping her fist exuberantly. "Sette, you're going to have a blast, I promise!"

"I see no court, nor ball." I said. "So I believe Cinque was mistaken about the ball being in your court. I apologize."

"... yeah. Yeah, that's great." Nove said. She did not sound as enthusiastic.

Perhaps she had been looking forward to having a ball.

Chapter 6

Chapter Six:

I followed Nove into the gymnasium/dojo where she acted as a teacher of the Midchildan close range martial style Strike Arts (Developed in the period ranging from 6-10 A.B., there is some debate on who was the first actual practitioner. I'm afraid I shall have to do additional research), the gym bag she had packed for me tucked under my arm. I had wished to bring more advanced armaments, but Nove had restricted me to only a gi and a change of clothing.

I felt that Nove was perhaps underestimating the security risks involved. This was a membership gym, but per my initial security sweep they also ran occasional public an unrestricted public location. Any one of these children could be an assassin, with the possible exception of the child near the front desk who appeared to be three years old (Only possible. She might have had a small explosive device inside her plush bear). We had to be prepared for...

Nove smacked me lightly on the back of my head. It was unpleasant, but as she was a superior officer for this mission, I did not return fire. I considered the research I had done on social conventions as of now, and determined what would instead be a more appropriate response.

I said, "Ouch."

Nove rolled her eyes. "Sette, I volunteer here four days a week. There's never been so much as a burglary in all that time. This building is perfectly safe, so you can stop looking around like there are snipers in the potted plants."

"Negative, the pots are too small for even the physically smallest sniper to fit inside along with the plant. It is, however, possible that some kind of small drone is inside, and it is possible that even a fist-sized unit could conceal a small-caliber lethal weapon, or a small quantity of plastique explosive if it was meant to act as a suicide unit rather than a-

Nove smacked me lightly on the back of the head, again.

"Ouch," I said, again.

"As I was saying, I have been going here for years, you loonie. Nobody is going to pop out of anywhere and kill us."

"If we *knew* they were going to pop out, it would be a very poor assassination attempt, Nove. That is why vigilance is important," I explained patiently. Subtle operations had never been her particular strong suit. It was entirely possible she needed this explained to her.

"Just go get changed, Sette."

"Objective confirmed."

After leaving the locker room in the gi that Nove had chosen for me, I entered the training hall where her intermediate lessons took place. I noticed immediately that many of the students were young, probably no older than nine or ten years old. I approved; inducting children to martial skills at a young age was essential to good soldiering. I felt very certain that I would meet many of these youngsters on the battlefield one day, and they would be complete professionals in the encounter.

While fewer, there were a number of older girls as well, ranging from as young as pre-pubescent to as old as the cusp of adulthood. Again, I approved. It indicated that this particular martial style began at a young age and continued training throughout the formative years and into adulthood, showing a thoroughness I could appreciate.

I began to relax. Nove had been right; Strike Arts seemed like something I could appreciate after all.

Four girls broke out of the crowd, running up at Nove with large smiles on their faces. They did not appear to be armed, so I prepared to initiate non-lethal countermeasures as requested by Cinque (Primary Mission Objectives: "Try not to kill anyone, for God's sake.") before Nove clamped a hand onto my shoulder and informed me, "No hitting anyone until class starts officially, Sette."

"Confirmed," I said. This was a somewhat short-sighted order, but I would do my best to work with it. Nove was not known for her tactical skill.

"Oh, Nove! I heard that one of your sisters would be coming," said the first girl, a small blonde with mismatched red and green eyes. "My name is..."

"Sankt Kaiser Recreation Project, subject #18. The first successful duplicate," I said. "Congratulations on achieving genetic fusion."

"...V-Vivio...?" Subject #18 said.

"Yes, that is your unofficial designation. However, it is highly non-indicative of your

true nature, so I tend to prefer the use of your official project and number. It makes things tidier," I confirmed.

Nove winced. "Sette, call her Vivio."

"New orders processed. From this point on, Sankt Kaiser Recreation Project Subject #18 shall be referred to by its unofficial designation," I said. Emboldened by this new order, I chose to engage in Secondary Objective, 'socialize'. "Hello, Vivio. How has your life been since you were created in a laboratory as part of a weapons experiment?"

"... .. Good?" Vivio said.

"That is nice," I said. "My life has also been good since I was created in a laboratory as part of a more fully realized weapons project. Perhaps later, we can discuss the ways in which our lives have been good, and the differing types of re-purposed military hardware used in our constructions."

"I... think I need a drink of water," Vivio said. "I feel dizzy."

"It is unlikely you are ill. As a designer human, your immune system is nearly perfect," I offered helpfully.

Two of the other girls, a dark-haired young lady and another blonde, one more lightly built than the other children, stepped between myself and Vivio defensively, despite having little reason to since I was offering her no threat and in fact bonding with her quite well.

"Stop saying things like that!" the dark haired one said angrily.

"Yeah! Vivio isn't some project, she's our friend!" the other agreed.

I blinked. "They are mutually exclusive?"

"... Huh?"

"Your statement implies they are mutually exclusive, i.e. 'She could be created in a laboratory as part of an experiment, or she could be our friend'. I was unaware that she could not be both. Be advised that she was, in fact, created in a laboratory, as part of an experiment. If this offends you, I recommend you cut social ties soon," I said. Then, turning to subject #18, I said "Vivio, please be aware as you grow older that you may often experience social distrust of this nature. You should not let it upset you, or dissuade you from the efficient accomplishment of whatever mission

objectives your superiors deem important."

Nove blinked at me. "Sette, I can't decide if that was horrible or sweet."

I turned to look at her, confused. "I do not think it was anything important. I am merely imparting useful information into Vivio, as one who has more life experience. Artificially created beings often have to face a great deal of discrimination, as I learned in prison when Rebecca 'Shanks' Moreau attempted to kill me in the shower because, and I quote, '[EXPLETIVE DELETED] tin soldiers piss me off, way you [EXPLETIVE DELETED] be walkin' around like you own the place.' She must be cautious when dealing with racists such as these horrible children, lest they attempt to shank her as well."

The room became very silent. I assumed this to be because of my wisdom.

"I... I think I need a glass of water too..." the dark-haired girl said.

"Yeah, I... am a bit dizzy," the blonde agreed.

"Let's... let's go..." Vivio said. "Find... some water or... something."

"Be cautious, Vivio. Though I detect no weaponry on these two, they cannot be trusted to not attempt to assault you when your back is turned," I advised her. "They envy your clear and easily defined sense of purpose, while they themselves are the product of random genetic permutation and have no obvious reason to exist."

The three girls left, then, their heads hanging low and a palpable aura of some emotion (I assumed joy). I nodded in satisfaction at a job well done.

Nove winced. "Um, Sette, I'm gonna go try to lure my advanced class out of their existential funk. You stay here with Einhart and... I don't know. Try not to drive her to alcoholism."

I turned to the young girl who had remained, Designation Einhart, and said, "Extended alcohol use can have negative effects on your physical well-being, most particularly liver function. Please avoid it if possible." Objective completed.

"Yes, thank you," she said, quietly. "I will take that under advisement."

Finally, someone who appreciated my well-thought-out advice. I had begun to wonder if my efforts would be ignored for the duration of my term of service with the Nakajima family. Emboldened by this early success, I chose to again attempt socialization. "My name is Sette. I am a Scaglietti Model cyborg, combat-class. My

interests include reading and mid-to-long range aerial combat."

The girl's eyes widened, and some tension leaked out of her posture. "Oh, really? I haven't studied such things much, beyond the few distance strikes present in Kaiser arts. My specialization is more in the area of close-range melee. If you would like to exchange advice, I would appreciate your pointers in becoming more well-rounded."

I felt something which I believe was joy, then. For the first time since my release from prison, I had encountered someone who made perfect sense.

"Of course. I would be very happy to discuss tactics. Tell me, have you read any of the tactical manuals published by General Roculus Volvo?"

Einhart blushed. "I have the collected works. I like to read a passage before bed each night, so I can think of them as I sleep."

I nodded. "Yes, that *is* very comforting."

Einhart smiled, her eyes lighting up. "Is it not just? I've always felt that each re-reading adds something to my personal understanding of the martial arts, even if they are designed more for traditional battlefield tactics rather than one-on-one confrontation."

"Well, the two have more similarities than many give them credit for. The scale may be different, but both rely heavily on understanding and predicting the actions of the enemy," I pointed out. "Any warrior, regardless of their chosen specialization, can benefit from enhanced understanding of basic tactics."

"Yes, yes!" Einhart agreed excitedly. "I've always thought this was more than clear, but it's so uncommon a viewpoint. A tactic that an army uses on the battlefield can almost always be altered for use by a martial artist in the arena, and vice-versa. It is only a question of understanding the basic lesson and adapting it as needed."

"Well, I'll be damned."

Einhart and I turned to see Nove looking on us with a small smile on her face. "Hello, sister. Einhart and I were discussing the similarities between large-scale tactics and individual combat strategy in a martial arts setting."

"It was very illuminating. I was wondering if I might have Sette's interlink address so we could continue after class," Einhart agreed.

"You know what? As soon as she has one, we'll get right on that," Nove said. "Get

ready for class, you two.

My sister patted me on the shoulder, and whispered in my ear, "One out of four ain't too bad for a first try."

Author's Note: Wow, it has been a *long* time on this one. That said, it also just kinda flew by, didn't it? I mean, it's kinda short but it also flowed like nobody's business! I gotta love that.

Now let's see if that doesn't happen again. The story *is* near the end, so I may just make it a focus until it's done.

As always, check my profile for additional works, fanfic and original fiction alike. Hope you enjoy!