

The Experimental Bug
by
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CHAPTER 01

She never could get much sleep.

Just as well, she figured. She could catch a nap before class if this test went well enough. So long as she wasn't out until sunrise, she'd probably be okay.

Maybe, for once, she wouldn't have that nightmare.

As she stood out there that night, on the roof of an old historical building downtown, she questioned the sanity of chasing that nightmare. Would she be able to stand up and face it, if she saw it? Was that demon she saw in her dreams the key to finding her father?

And yet, there she was, wearing her untested battle suit, trailing her father's ex-employers to see just what they were chasing after.

There'd been reports for months of random bits of property destruction that looked impossible to be caused by humans. Chunks of buildings seemed to be gnawed away, multiple establishments in the downtown district robbed or outright vandalized... On the surface, it seems like some petty crime ring the RCPD (Rock City Police Department) should've been handling just fine.

Bu, they weren't. They seemed to have quietly hired *this* company - Aegis Security Agency - to crack down on these cases.

The same company that fired my dad years ago. Convenient.

She'd found a small group of their agents that splintered off, seemingly tracking someone or something on the ground. She, on the other hand,

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tracked that group on the rooftops. *

What she didn't expect, was for another group of agents to be on the rooftops as well. She might have avoided them, if the suit's tracking disruption abilities hadn't decided to randomly fail right when she got close. *

Four men in black suits, and one dark-peach girl in black sweats and a hoodie... The scene before here was more like something from an edgy pop-music video. *

The hoodie-wearing girl stepped forward, twirling a baton in her right hand, holding its matching baton in her left at ease. Her blonde hair seemed far too long to be at all comfortable, as her bangs blew across her face in the breeze. *

Her smile was frighteningly cheerful. "Hey, you know, maybe you should just power that suit down and surrender, Bug Girl." *

Ugh, Bug Girl? She held in her groan. *I already don't like you.* *

She hoped that whoever they were chasing would give her clues about the whereabouts of her own missing father. After a full year of searching, this was the first bit of *something* that resembled a lead. *

And yet, here she was, cornered by a lead agent and her little band of peons on her inaugural night. *

If only she remembered to install that voice changer... *Can't risk getting my voice sampled. Which means I get to listen to her try to intimidate me, and not answer back.* *

That sucks. *

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"I don't want to tell ya' stuff you already know, but," the girl pointed *
to her left, then right, then right behind her. "You're pretty badly *
outnumbered. Probably won't go well." *

Bug was barely paying attention. Her mind had already switched her top *
priority to "escape." *

"Oh come on! Are you really going to ignore me and make this worse for *
yourself?" She moaned like a spoiled brat. "I mean, I can only hold these *
guys back for so long. They're kinda' bored of desk work." *

This girl had the nerve to smile at Bug, like she really was doing Bug *
some miraculous favor. *You're asking me to surrender, not a Scott-free* *
trip out of the country. Tone the creepy smile down, please. *

"No choice, agents." The oldest agent amongst the four gave the cold *
command, drawing a sleek handgun from his waist. *

"Wait, wait hold on!" The girl stepped to his side, resting a hand on the *
barrel of the gun, then gently lowering his aim to ground. "I can handle *
her, no need for all of that is there?" *

The agent looked at her, then sighed. "Alright Miss Mars. She's yours. But *
if she causes you trouble, we're taking her down." *

"Jesus old man, chill a little, okay? You act like I'm *not* the lead on *
this to begin with." *

Bug wasn't sure what to make of this girl. For someone threatening to take *
her down in moments, this "Miss Mars" talked like some annoyed high-school *
teenager. *

When Mars' first swing just barely missed the tip of Bug's jaw, her *

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perception of the quirky woman quickly changed. *

Bug did not hesitate to draw her Powered Staff, but just as soon as she held the thing in her hands, Mars nearly knocked it loose. She grabbed each end of the staff, and planted her feet before shoving it right into Mars' batons. *

Mars nearly fell over from just that. *

Bug saw the chance to strike at Mars' again, but found her staff easily repelled by Mars' batons this time. She knew there was a chance she'd be outclassed in a straight-up fight. What she had to rely on now was her battle suit allowing her to keep the advantage. *

This Mars girl is obnoxious. *

When Mars landed a hit right in her abdomen, she had her suit's strength confirmed. *Little bit of a tingle, but other than that...* *

She got back to her feet quickly, tumbling away from Mars' next flurry of swings. Even if it didn't hurt much, she still didn't need the suit taking any unnecessary damage. After all, she'd have to repair it herself, and she couldn't even be sure there was enough raw materials to do so. *

Bug caught a moment to whip her staff around, bouncing Mars back a few feet and finally giving herself some breathing room while Mars continued to tumble from the impact. *

Bug took off like a rocket, sprinting, aiming straight for Mars' legs. *If I can just knock her off her feet, just hit her legs hard enough to...* *

She wasn't able to stop her momentum, realizing too late that she was back in Mars' range, and Mars had already gotten back to her feet. *Need to do* *

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something fast...

*

Bug tumbled to the left, then ran at Mars again.

*

The smack of Bug's staff colliding with Mars' thigh echoed through the air. She nearly fell on her bum as she tried to cope with this new pain.

*

*

Even with that convincing strike, Mars was back on her feet far faster than Bug would have liked.

*

*

Oh come on! Would you give me a break with this? Why are you standing already?

*

*

A shot from Mars' baton collided with Bug's left forearm, causing the disembodied voice in her computerized helmet to ring out, "Suit damage minimal" multiple times.

*

*

*

Mars followed with three more shots to Bug's calves and her right hand. Of all the areas of the battle suit, those in particular were weak areas, where the armor and the cloth underneath it were not nearly as well protected.

*

*

*

*

But... How the hell would she know that? Lucky guesses?

*

Bug nearly dropped her staff from the hand strikes. "Suit damage minimal. Gauntlet damage minimal."

*

*

"Minimal? You're not the one that actually felt that," Bug mumbled, trying to shake off the pain on her knuckles.

*

*

She had to leap out of the way of Mars' next swing to give herself time to think. All she had was a second, and Mars' next swing was already coming too quick.

*

*

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However, her swing at Bug's helmet was so far off, even Bug was amazed. *

Bug wasn't going to hesitate. She wasn't sure why she missed, but that gave her the chance to whack her in the side with her staff, this time making sure the business end of it hit Mars fully. Bug wasn't ready for the impact herself, nearly spraining her own wrist. *

Mars folded over and nearly collapsed in a heap, holding the left side of her gut. And yet, she still returned a cheeky little smirk at Bug. *

The heck're you smirking at? *

"Alright. You had your fun, Mars." The older agent trained his weapon on Bug once again. *

Mars sighed, her left hand firmly rubbing her new injury. "Alright, alright," she whined. "But let's make sure we don't do too much damage, alright? Gotta' keep the suit clean." *

Bug was still smarting from her fight with Mars, trying to take a moment to catch her breath. This was, after all, her first actual fight in that Battle Suit. *

This situation isn't improving the longer I stand here. Don't want to sacrifice the staff but... *

She let loose a puff of air. *Well, that fight was more than enough of a test. I think I can call this a success for now. Guess I do owe this "Mars" girl, in a weird way.* *

That, doesn't sit well with me. *

A neon-indigo beam flared from the shaft of the old man's pistol, grazing *

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the armor of her left leg. Almost immediately, her body armor reacted with a flurry of "warnings" and "cautions" all over her visor's view. The round itself fizzled into the ground with barely a ripple, only leaving a few sparks in its death.

"That was your one and only warning," the old man continued, the three other agents following his lead and aiming their own guns at Bug. "Hands up."

She did as asked, realizing what she'd just witnessed. *What kind of weapon is that and why the hell is it interfering with my suit?*

Mars ran in front of her allies, arms outstretched. "Guys, hey, woah! Do all of you need to draw your weapons? And didn't I say *keep the suit clean?*"

"Agent Mars. You're in the way."

Bug could see Mars' once jovial face sour as she looked to the other agents, then back to the man arguing her supposed authority. Even she had to admit, if that girl was the leader, she sure as hell didn't act like it.

At least, not until that moment.

"I'm also the lead here, right? So can you guys put your weapons down? It's *one* spy in body armor. I don't think we need to fry the suit. Which, by the way, is what we're supposed to try to *confiscate*, not *fry*. Two totally different words. And by the way? Frying the person *wearing the suit* isn't exactly our goal either."

"This isn't going to fry the person wearing the suit," he shot back. "And you're the same level of security I am, Mars. You're the lead but I have the right to supercede that, per the Director herself. Now--"

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"If I'm unable to perform," she shouted back. "I'm pretty sure I can do that just fine, thanks! So if you don't mind..."

Bug wasn't going to take their arguing for granted, whether Mars started that whole dispute on purpose or not.

She jammed the staff into the ground before her. The light that burst out of the metal beam was like a miniature sun exploding right before their eyes. If not for the lenses of her helmet temporarily blocking her vision, she would have been just as blind as the agents surrounding her.

By the time the light faded, she'd already run to the western edge of the roof, going as fast as her feet - and the suit's mini-propulsion systems - could take her.

She didn't dare look back at the barrage of laser rounds following her, but she could tell the agents were all still disoriented as their rounds continued to zoom way overhead. One blue ray zipped past the left side of her head however, causing immediate interference. The gold, glowing "eyes" of her helmet were the only visual outlet to the world without deactivating the suit completely, so the static was a massive worry.

Well, that is certainly something that shouldn't be happening!

She flung her body across another rooftop as the four agents gave chase. They weren't as brave about leaping from roof to as she was, but then again, they didn't have the added bonus her armor's jet-propelled boots offered. She wasn't going to take off flying by any means, but leaping a few feet between those small alley gaps wasn't much of a chore.

Bug continued to make distance, realizing there was no way they catch up with her. Who in their right mind would follow her in that manner without her gear?

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Of course. That idiot.

Mars was a few buildings behind, latching on to each building ahead with her batons, which apparently had claw attachments built-in for such an occasion.

Bug was at a loss seeing the girl chase after her! "Who the hell even thinks to do that," she blurted aloud, forgetting her lack of a voice changer in her shock. "Oh, I may need to leap across buildings one night, better add *freakin' claws* to these things!"

Though Mars was barely making the leap at times, her determination put fear into Bug. Even Mars' fellow agents called her insane, pleading with her to give it up.

And yet she kept after her!

Bug knew there was only one way to lose her now - she had to jump a distance that was too far for that insane girl to even *think* about chasing her.

Main Street isn't too far. And if I'm going to test the gliding capabilities, no time like the present right?

Bug veered left on the next rooftop. *Right.*

She kept as much control as she could as her momentum kept her running forward, then spread her arms, as though she were about to swan dive into the traffic below.

"Glide."

She could hear Mars far behind her, yelling for Bug to wait, to not jump.

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She wish she could've seen the look on Mars' face when her seemingly *
decorative scarf flared outward like enormous wings, carrying her along *
the skyline. Combined with the propulsion from the boots of the armor, Bug *
sailed through the air with unnerving ease. *

If that girl pulls out a Hang Glider, I'm going to lose it. *

After a moment of sailing and peering behind her to make sure the girl *
wasn't giving chase in her own Hang Glider she somehow had conveniently *
stashed in her hoodie, Bug finally took a deep breath, exhaling her *
anxietis out as she sailed further on. *

She still had another challenge to conquer, however: *

Landing. *