**The Invitation**

**Chapter 1**

**By Kahncub Farina**

Inside the Administration building, Kahny stares up, high up at the particularly tall woman, her aura dominating. To best describe what Kahny sees as she looks up, she has the face of a wolf and the horns and ears of a bovine with six functioning arms, four of which look to be mechanical. Her entire body is covered in what could be described as a Korps-emblazoned uniform made to be a tight fit to accentuate the large, well-shaped curves on her chest. Her magenta RCGs cover the color of her eyes, but the way she looks through the lenses with them was giving the impression she’s all business as she looks down at a keycard similar to the one Asuka used to get Kahny and her into the base.

 After a moment, the large woman’s eyes look down at Kahny and perhaps she realizes for a moment that she’s intimidated by her presence. Her demeanor changes a little bit so as to appear a bit more relaxed. “You’re all set to go, Kahny. This is your keycard. It should work universally to get you into The Undertow as well as any of our other installations. This includes KDS in Toronto, which is the main headquarters.” One of her mechanical arms reaches out to offer the keycard. Kahny grabs it and smiles a bit nervously; “Thank you very much Miss… uhm, what shall I call you?”

“My full title is Civil Control Counselor Balina Dakós, but Counselor Dakós will suffice. If you need anything regarding replacing your RCGs, losing your keycard, or anything like that, come see me here.” Kahny nods and smiles as she puts her keycard in one of her other latex trench coat pockets, separate from where she keeps her Focus. “Thanks. Be seeing you then, Counselor Dakós!”

After finishing up at Administration, Kahny walks out with a new red translucent keycard similar to the one that Asuka has. She takes a moment to gaze around her surroundings. It’s honestly majestic; she was below the depths of the SF Bay, but it feels like a living, breathing campus down here. To her left there is an obvious food court beyond the large Korps helix installation in the middle, as well as the mess hall across the way—probably where Asuka was talking about getting food.

 “If you want to take a moment to just walk around before we begin the tour, let me know. I get it. This is a similar reaction that all of the new agents who come down here give,” Asuka chimes in before putting a paw on Kahny’s shoulder, “but there was one more thing I mentioned to you after we got you registered.”

 It’s at that moment that her RCGs suddenly feel like they’re showing her something she hasn’t seen until now. An HUD appears in her eyes with a magenta rose in the middle. It feels like some sort of startup sequence, but the information scrolling down in front of her eyes is foreign, not something she understands—more like some sort of alien language. As the alien-looking text scrolls, she then sees something that she can read in plain English:

*New Agent Summary*

*Name: Kahncub Farina, AKA Kahny*

*Age: 24*

*Pronouns: She/Her*

*Power(s): Magical Girl; associated secondary powers to be determined*

*Weapons: Two magnum revolvers: Luna and Sena*

*Status: Acquired
Role: TO BE DETERMINED*

*Residence: Processing*

Kahny is about to reach up to take her RCGs off and give a quizzical question to Asuka until she hears something in her ears. It’s a voice, but it isn’t Asuka’s voice...

 “Why hello there, Miss Farina! It’s a pleasure to meet you, and welcome to the Korps! I am ROSE, and I am here to assist you in any way that I can!” Kahny jumps at the sudden new voice. At this point she looks at Asuka with shock and surprise.

 “That’s ROSE, and yes, you can actually talk back to her. If you want, you can even think what you want to say to her. She’s not like a common consumer product voice recognition AI. She’s a living network who can do a ton of different things. I mentioned in my email to you that if you need something like GPS coordinates, the RCGs can do that. ROSE can give you those even better than the consumer grade RCGs without her. But also like, if you need perhaps a bit of a sedative help to calm yourself down, she’s got you there too. You need someone to just simply talk to like a friend, you’d be surprised how friendly ROSE can be. Each ROSE is tailored to the agent, so yours probably doesn’t sound or speak like mine but effectively they do the same thing.” Asuka takes her visor and turns it around to show Kahny. “I dunno what yours sounds like to you, but mine’s like a more feminine version of myself because that’s what I was feeling I wanted at the time, you know?”

 “Well, I suppose that explains why mine sounds cheery and so inclined to be helpful. I guess that’s what I am looking for at the moment” Kahny says as she looks through her lenses. She notices the magenta rose up in the upper-right hand corner of her field of view now. Definitely giving that ‘HUD’ feel to it. “Correct!” ROSE chimes into Kahny’s ears, “Anything that I can do to help make your life a little bit better, a little bit easier as we all fight to make this world a better place for everyone, let me know! Say it, think it, both works. But how about for starters, we start with a guided tour of The Undertow?”

And with that, an Augmented Reality version of GPS appears in her field of vision. Landmark names appear where she looks and even give her a line to follow, along with arrows pointing in one direction.

 Asuka smirks at Kahny. “I’ll let ROSE take it from here, but I’m also gonna tag along with you if you wanna talk or need anything from me at all. Besides, I didn’t make you bring your Focus for nothing,” she says as she takes her paw off of Kahny’s shoulder and puts her own RCGs back on in front of her eyes. Kahny nods and smiles “Thank you, Asuka and ROSE. Go ahead, let the tour begin then.”

 ROSE’s cheery disposition chimes back into Kahny’s ears, “You got it! So let’s start with where you currently are. We call this the Entry Dome as this is where most agents will enter and exit from above Alcatraz Island. You’ve seen one gate, but we have another directly inside of the prison itself. When you get past the checkpoint, the Mess Hall will be directly to your right. Directly in front of you will be a fixture of our well known sigil, the Helix. If you just want to chill out in Entry watching the monitor above, it shows Korps-specific events and information, depending on what’s going on at the time.”

 “Hold on.” Kahny pauses ROSE there. “Are you saying the Korps has their own network of entertainment that they broadcast here? Like, what kind of things are we talking about?”

 “Well, since we know you’re into Professional Wrestling, you’ll be pleased to hear that we have our own division called Korps Championship Wrestling! The matches are mostly hosted at KDS, our main headquarters, and are broadcasted to the other bases across North America. You may even be interested in a couple of the wrestlers such as The Porcelain Cheshire, or perhaps the KCW Tag Team Champions Veronica Sparks and Rena Nocturne! But let’s move on from that for now. If you ever find yourself just wanting to hang out here, there’s something visual you can definitely check out on the big screen. Is it okay to continue?” ROSE asks before proceeding with the tour.

Kahny nods her head with a smirk as she looks up at the screen. “Sure, go for it.”

 “Alright then!” ROSE affirms. “You’ve already seen Administration, which is useful to existing agents for things such as lost keycards, needing a new pair of RCGs, directions, stuff like that. Behind Administration, however, is our Observatory! We’re beneath the waves of the SF Bay, so there’s aquatic life down here. If you just want to see what that life looks like lit up, this is the space! It can also be used for mission-related observation as well for topside things going on on the mainland. To the right of that, we have our very own Food Court! The Korps has recruited some excellent agents who excel at culinary arts, and they are here to give you great meals down here. And don’t worry about an economy down here. We’re a supervillain organization who takes care of our own! It would be counterintuitive to ask you to support capitalism by making you pay for things like food.” Kahny and Asuka follow along on foot as ROSE explains things. There’s one more space in Entry that is labeled: “Vehicle Parking.”

“We get vehicles down here?!”

Asuka chimes in on this one. “Where do you think we store that motorcycle Torrez brought onto the ferry? The bicycle Luna came on with? We can bring those down here and safely store them. Just pop them on the ferry and go on and off the island. We’ll take good care of them.”

 “I think now is a good time to hop on the light rail to the next dome, but whenever you’re ready, Kahny!” ROSE has been very informative and helpful during this tour thus far helping her get her bearings down here, so Kahny nods and looks around. She sees a marker for a light rail passenger platform. Asuka and Kahny both move towards it and wait. Already standing on the platform, Kahny notices a lady hanging out: a dragoness with long, dark hair and a more rounded-out visor than Asuka’s, two curved horns on her head, and a gold helix on a red neckpiece on her front. It was hard not to stare a little bit at such a revealing outfit. Her breasts push up above her top, and she barely wears anything below.

She looks at Kahny and Asuka and smiles. “Good evening, you two.”

“‘Sup, Karen,” Asuka chimes nonchalantly as she waves. Kahny waves as well and gives a shy smile. She doesn’t know anyone at this point, and meeting new folks who she might be seeing around makes her a bit shy. She thinks back to before she changed herself and how she used to have it easy meeting new people and making new friends; it feels a bit like a struggle now. When she has to turn her charms on, it’s like flipping a switch for that moment. But when it comes to *actually* being genuine, she starts to feel shy around others. She even still feels a bit shy around Asuka.

It’s at this moment that ROSE notices the apprehension towards greeting Karen that she speaks up: “You really don’t have to be shy around her, or anyone here Kahny. Here, let me help a little bit with that.” ROSE kicks in that soft spiral that Kahny remembers from the first time she put the RCGs on. “Last time you saw this, you didn’t have me to speak to you. Do me a favor while you look in the lenses this time? I want you to take a deep breath, and then exhale. Repeat this a few times. I assure you this will be of help.” Kahny nods and does as ROSE asked. She takes deep breaths, then exhales them. Combined with the help of the spiral, she begins to feel less apprehensive, a bit less shy about greeting Karen.

After a moment, she smiles a bit—more genuinely this time—towards Karen. A more natural, less shy tone is in her voice. “Good evening. Nice to meet you, by the way. I’m Kahny, I just got here.” Karen nods and gives a pleasant grin towards her. “I’m aware; welcome. I’m sure we’ll be seeing each other a lot as time goes on.” Kahny nods back, still smiling. In the corner of her RCGs, she sees some legible text appear in front of her vision next to where Karen stands:

*Name: Karen*

*Pronouns: She/They*

*Species: Dragon*

“Woah, that’s cool,” Kahny says with awe. Asuka has an idea of what Kahny was referring to, but before she continues the conversation, a light rail train is sliding down the track, slowing its speed to a stop next to the platforms. The doors on the passenger car slid open and some folks filed out of them. Different folks come out, all wearing variants of the RCGs that are on the trio’s faces. Some have rounded visors, some have more rectangular designs fitting squarely over muzzles. Kahny feels like, from what she sees, she’s the only one who has proper sunglasses as her RCGs. Perhaps it really was an aesthetics thing as to why hers doesn’t look like any others that she’s seen.

 When it’s clear to get onto the light rail, Asuka, Karen and Kahny each file in. There are some plush-looking cushions on the seats. Asuka doesn’t sit down; Kahny wonders if she should. Karen, however, parks in one of the seats nearby.

 “We’re not going to be on here long as we make our way through to the next dome. Each stop is going to have something you’ll find useful and want to know about. It’ll be fun though! It’s everything you could ever hope for to help you do what you do best, *and* be cared for in ways you probably never imagined being in that hotel room,” Asuka grins at Kahny as they move through a short tunnel. The glass it’s made of looks to be made from the same material as the previous dome, so as to not crack and break under the pressure of the SF Bay waters—and to allow passengers to look out at the sea around them.

 They arrive at the platforms of the next dome. ROSE puts text up in front of Kahny’s RCGs that simply reads “Equipment.” The doors slide open, allowing Kahny and Asuka to exit. ROSE speaks up once again as the light rail shuts the doors and moves along its path again.

 “Welcome to the Equipment Dome! This is the space our agents come for when they need any sort of armor, weapons, or equipment for an operation. It is also the space where our security forces are headquartered. To your right as you come off of the light rail you will find the Firing Range. With the different variety of weapons our agents use, from hand guns like yours to railguns and everything in between, this is a space you can safely come to if you just want to practice firing armaments. You will also notice to the right of that there is a Quartermaster station. Just let them know what you need, and they will take care of you!”

 Kahny nods as she listens. She flips the front of her trench coat back to reveal her holsters underneath—and her girls strapped inside. Luna and Sena have been with her for the past three or so years. It would honestly be nice to just get some practice shots in with them from time-to-time.

 “If you just want to load rounds into Luna and Sena, you can get some bullets from the Quartermaster and then head to the Firing Range! Don’t worry about time, ammo consumption, or anything like that if you just need a cathartic time firing them at the range.”

 ROSE’s comments surprise Kahny for a moment; “Wait, how does ROSE know about the names I gave my guns? I never told those to anyone. I also noticed that earlier—when, I guess, my RCGs were unlocked?—it had their names in my information.”

Asuka taps her head with a grin as she looks at Kahny. “The RCGs, much like how I was talking to you before, can read your thoughts. If you’re thinking what you might have said, ROSE can see that. I know that might take a bit of getting used to but I assure you ROSE is not here to invade any sort of privacy. If you don’t want ROSE discussing your thoughts with you just let her know. Or, you know, take your RCGs off, whatever works.”

 “That said, those are lovely names for your pistols, Kahny! They sound like they go together—much like they do in your paws!” Kahny gives a satisfied smirk at that. She pulls Luna and Sena out of their holsters and spins them around on her index paw digits. If there’s one thing she loves to do with her guns it’s just spinning them. One snap motion slams the barrels back into their holsters and she giggles a bit. “Thanks ROSE. And they do go together. One is never without the other.”

 The light rail train makes its way back towards the platforms again. Asuka looks at it, and then back at Kahny. “I think this time I want to walk a bit instead of making another short jaunt through the tube again. You feel like walking, or would you like to hang out here a bit longer?” Kahny looks around from where they stand. There are a couple of buildings that haven’t been mentioned yet that ROSE brought up indicators for. One is labeled “Hydro Plant” while the other is labeled “Docking Bay.” Kahny finds herself curious to learn more about the docking bay, to which ROSE helpfully offers an explanation.

 “Our base, The Undertow, is located beneath the San Francisco Bay, embedded right into Alcatraz Island. Ferry is not the only way to get in and out of the base. We also have aquatic vehicles to transport agents in and out. Please note that there is a checkpoint system in place so as to not let the wrong folks, such as some sea-swimming Brigade member just simply docking whatever submarine they wanted here and invading our home. If you have need to leave via the docking bay, feel free to! Though if I may, if it’s just for a casual trip out to The Embarcadero I’d still like to suggest the K-LINE ferry. It’s inconspicuous enough that you can get on and off of that as you please.”

 Kahny nods as she listens and looks towards the docking bay. Her curiosity about that satiated, she shifts focus to Asuka. “Alright, I’m good to walk now.” Asuka nods and beckons Kahny to follow her down a tunnel next to the Firing Range. The walls in here are solid steel, contrasting the domes Kahny was just looking at. Judging by the direction that they’re heading, they’re no longer going around Alcatraz; they are now walking *through* the rock formation. The walls have a thick pink line running along them. ROSE puts text up in front of Kahny’s lenses again: “Now entering Residential.” When Asuka and Kahny come out of the tunnel, it opens up quite a bit in a way Kahny was not expecting.

There’s a whole living, breathing world created underneath all of this rock. Lights above that look like they’re mimicking a sunsetting pattern. It’s after 6PM, and it looks like dusk in here. Every direction Kahny turns, she sees greenery. Trees, plants, flowers, grass. “The works” for what definitely could be considered a residential area. Kahny’s eyes light up wide at what she sees. She thought the domes with the amenities there were impressive; this, however, feels like dream-come-true material for a world she’s trying to make. A safe haven for people to come and live comfortably.

When Kahny and Asuka reach a crossroads, ROSE gives her directions on which way was what. To her left, she could walk directly back to the Entry Dome. Directly ahead of where they stood is labeled “Crew Quarters,” and to her right is labeled “Personal Care.” Asuka puts a paw on Kahny’s shoulder as she looks towards the open park area by the Crew Quarters.

“Pretty nice, huh? The Korps treats its agents right. We’re the best at what we do because everyone is able to *be* at their best thanks to living a life that doesn’t feel like we’re just trying to scrape by. I’ll take you to your new apartment down here later, but for now let’s head across the way. Follow me, I’ll show you Personal Care later.”

“Across?” Kahny and Asuka head towards the Entry Dome down the path, away from the Crew Quarters. She takes in the sights of folks just chilling together—either solo, together on a bench, or even hanging out on a grassy spot. She’s once again struck by the varying degree of designs for RCGs on their faces as they walk by.

“Yeah, there’s more on the other side of where we’re at. I just felt like a walk would be nice instead of taking the light rail. Plus it would give you an idea of the space, the view of where you’d be living and looking out to see. We keep this maintained so as to make it a place people want to be.” Kahny nods and smiles as she looks around through the slight pink tint of the lenses in front of her eyes. ROSE pops occasional information about things in the area, such as where the Hospital is, the occasional random agent’s name, and, when she looks upwards, where exactly they were below the old iconic prison. Soon ROSE produces text to appear for the next dome that they’re approaching through Residential: “Research & Development.”

“Besides your new apartment, this is the last stop that Asuka wanted to take you to for this tour. This is the Research and Development dome. A lot of our advancements in technology, medical advancements, as well as magic and technology research are done here.”

Kahny nods as she walks with Asuka, looking at the various buildings inside this dome, ROSE once again helpful in pointing out names for each: “Medical Research,” “Weapons Research,” “Magic Research.” Asuka gets in front of Kahny and walks across the light rail tracks. “I want to finish up by taking you here. Particularly Magic Research.” Kahny tilts her head, curious. Then it dawned on her as to why, *specifically,* Magic Research.

“Bingo!” ROSE confirms. “This is about your Focus, and your abilities to transform once again. We’re quite aware of your inability to bring yourself to transform for a few years. Perhaps we can see if there would be any issues with that going forward if you were to try and do it again after so long. We not only wish to help you bring that out of you, but also see if there’s any sort of potential understanding and adjustments that need to be done—but I’ll let the team at Magic Research talk more with you about that.”

ROSE was kind for being transparent about why they were coming here. She feels a little bit of that nervousness coming back to her when she thinks about it. “I dunno if I am ready for that quite yet,” Kahny remarks as she looks at the building. It isn’t that she’s feeling any sort of anxiety. This is her simply not being ready to face that which she avoided for the past three years. She doesn’t know what would happen, if anything at all at this point.

Asuka notices Kahny looking like she was in her own thoughts about this. Looking back at Magic Research, she nods before turning back to Kahny. “Alright. I’m not gonna push you into something you’re not ready to do yourself. That’s not our M.O. here. You’ll need to do this eventually, but if now is not a good time I understand.” Asuka looks back towards the tunnel they came out of and her ears perk with an idea. “I got it. Your new quarters should be ready to be moved into. Wanna take a look? Maybe that will help you feel a bit better.”

Kahny looks up at Asuka and smiles a bit, nodding. “Let’s do that first. If I’m going to be spending a lot of time here, let’s take a look at where I’ll be living.” Asuka grins and nods as they head back towards the tunnel. “These are some pretty nice digs we get if I’m being honest.”

When Asuka & Kahny come back into Residential, they immediately make a left down a path as they enter. This leads them to all of the units agents reside in. “Allow me to assist you with directions!” ROSE chimes in before giving a guided path through the buildings in Kahny’s RCGs.

Kahny smiles and nods. “Thanks ROSE. I really appreciate all of the help you are giving me for being the new girl here.”

ROSE giggles a little bit. “Really it’s no trouble at all! If you need anything at all, you can let me know and I can assist you. Just let me know!”

Eventually Kahny and Asuka make it to a door with a sign on it that reads as following against a black plaque:

 *Kahny*



Kahny turns her head in confusion as she points at the alien-looking characters on the plaque. “What *is* this, anyway? I saw characters like this in my RCGs when they first booted up.”

Asuka takes this opportunity to answer before ROSE does “Korps Cipher. This basically just says your name like above, but in cipher. I’ll teach you how to read it later; it’s actually kinda cool to learn!”

While Asuka explains things, ROSE pulls up a few simplistic graph charts of what each letter and number in the alphabet has as a cipher allegory. Kahny nods “Huh… neat!” she exclaims before turning her attention to the door. It has a keycard reader where the knob would go, like one of those electronic locks you see at a hotel.

“You already have the key, Kahny! It’s the keycard you were given from Administration in your pocket. Just slide it in and it will unlock the door for you.” Kahny opens up her trench coat and dips her hand into one of the inner pockets, pulling out her red keycard. She slips the card into the slot, the door clicks open, and Asuka pipes up as she opens the door:

“Welcome to your new home in The Undertow.”