

## **DIMENSION FORCE**

### **a time travel escapade by Scotto Moore**

#### Characters

1. **Carissa** - a working class teenager on the mining colony of Vesta, who has developed powerful mental powers that she must hide from society. She has a fierce belief in the pursuit of justice, even if that means breaking the law to get it.
2. **Lorelei** - the youngest agent in Dimension Force history, Lorelei's intelligence is significantly enhanced by cybernetic implants in her mind. She's very self-sufficient, after being orphaned when her miner parents died in the Ceres 3 disaster.
3. **Anjette** - an elite Dimension Force agent, who is skilled with both close-quarters combat and interrogation.
4. **Agent Grey** - the no-nonsense director of the Dimension Force division stationed in Earth's solar system. Although she appears to be completely by-the-book, she trusts her agents and gives them more latitude to operate than they realize.
5. **Nicholas** - the Master Archivist of the Association, responsible for documenting history and protecting its many artifacts. He's held the position for so long that he's practically a part of history himself.
6. **Aleister** - the arrogant CEO of Infinitek, the most powerful corporation in the solar system. Although he reports to the Board of Directors on paper, in practice he reports to no one, and has no true moral compass, willing to do anything for money and power.
7. **Sally** - a miner on Vesta, secretly a passionate leader & organizer of the labor movement on Vesta, whose love for Mary can't overcome her mistrust for Carissa's emerging psionic powers.
8. **Mary** - a miner on Vesta, who believes the situation on Vesta is so volatile that she makes a deal with Infinitek that she hopes will remove her daughter Carissa to safety. Her heart's in the right place even if her tactics show poor judgment.
9. **Hannah** - Sally's daughter, a smart teenager on Vesta, who loses her step-sister Carissa when Sally and Mary split up, but then finds a new companion when she befriends Lorelei.
10. **Steven** - a smug corporate lawyer working for Infinitek, who believes he is in control of every situation; he finds out the hard way he is no match for Carissa.
11. **Emily** - Aleister's uptight personal assistant (and possibly more), who is oblivious to the many crimes he commits and is otherwise just a faithful employee of Infinitek.
12. **Ervin** - the Junior Archivist of the Association, which usually means staffing the front desk like a receptionist; but he remains cheerful about his status.
13. **Trick Start** - also known as the Pirate King, Trick Start is a mysterious engineer who takes delight in reverse engineering technology made by other cultures. He uses his shop on Vesta as a trading post when he's not cruising the solar system with his pirate fleet looking for artifacts and tech.
14. **Airee** - Trick Start's first mate on the fleet, a sharp engineer who isn't afraid to mouth off to her commanding officer.
15. **Bradley** - an extremely lifelike android, whose original ad-supported operating system is hacked by Airee and Trick Start in order to make him a loyal member of their crew.
16. **Olivia** - the senior director of Infinitek's research & development group, typically assigned "skunk works" projects that often cross the lines of legality and morality.

*Lights up on LORELEI, ANJETTE, AGENT GREY, and CARISSA, standing separately, addressing the audience.*

LORELEI: My name is Lorelei. I'm a Dimension Force agent - the only eighteen-year-old agent on the Force. The story you're about to hear makes my brain hurt - and that's impressive considering I've replaced all of my original organic brain matter with cyborg implants.

ANJETTE: My name is Anjette. I'm also a Dimension Force agent. They keep me around mainly to intimidate and punch people, but turns out you can't very well punch someone who sees it coming all the way from the *future*.

AGENT GREY: I'm Agent Grey. I run the Dimension Force division responsible for policing this entire solar system: Earth, Luna, Mars, and all the colonies in the asteroid belt. I report directly to Parliament - and if there's one single thing that terrifies Parliament, it's time travel.

CARISSA: My name is Carissa. I'm a criminal. I mean, whatever. Anyway, yes, I stole the time machine from the Association. In my defense - I had *reasons*.

*Carissa exits. Lights up on a briefing room, as Agent Grey addresses Lorelei and Anjette.*

AGENT GREY: Thank you for joining me, agents. At ease.

*Lorelei and Anjette sit.*

AGENT GREY: The briefing you're about to receive is classified at the highest level, on pain of treason against the Association, understood?

LORELEI / ANJETTE: Understood.

AGENT GREY: Half an hour ago we received the following tightbeam transmission from a satellite owned by Infinitek. It's the corporation that operates most of the mining colonies in the asteroid belt.

*Lights up on ALEISTER in his own light.*

ALEISTER: Greetings, oh mighty Association. My name is Aleister Rowland, CEO of Infinitek. You have long had in your possession a time machine, which I will be stealing from you in the very near future. Once I have it, I will be capable of reaching into the past and sowing the seeds of your eventual destruction. Unless, of course, you meet my single demand: release Carissa from your prison. I will contact you again in twenty-four hours.

*Lights out on Aleister.*

LORELEI: What's he talking about? I thought time travel was illegal!

AGENT GREY: Of course it's illegal. It's the most dangerous technology we know of.

ANJETTE: So why does the Association have a time machine?

*Lights up on NICHOLAS SOLITUDE elsewhere on stage, facing the agents.*

AGENT GREY: This is Nicholas Solitude, Master Archivist for the Association. Nicholas, would you please get my team up to speed?

NICHOLAS: Certainly. The time machine that Mr. Rowland is referring to dates back to the unregulated days before the treaty. Only one prototype was ever built. After a convincing demonstration that it actually worked, Management immediately banned any further experimentation into the mechanics of time travel, and the time machine itself was permanently locked away.

ANJETTE: How exactly did they demonstrate that it "actually worked"?

NICHOLAS: I'm afraid all specific details about the demonstration have been lost to history.

ANJETTE: Or *suppressed* from history, more like.

AGENT GREY: That's enough, Anjette.

NICHOLAS: At any rate, when the treaty was signed, time travel was first on the list of prohibited technologies. Every civilization that now signs the treaty must affirm that time travel is illegal and reprehensible. Any civilization we discover experimenting with time travel - whether they've signed the treaty or not - is subject to immediate and complete eradication by the fleet.

LORELEI: Complete eradication of an entire civilization? Isn't that rather severe?

NICHOLAS: If a civilization secretly mastered time travel, the repercussions for the Association would also be rather severe.

LORELEI: Would we even know if someone is already using time travel against the Association?

NICHOLAS: If they are, they're not using *our* time machine to do it.

ANJETTE: What happened to the prototype?

NICHOLAS: We've had it in protective custody, sealed away in our highest security Vault since before the treaty was even signed. Trust me, the time machine is perfectly safe here in the Archives.

*Lights out on Nicholas.*

ANJETTE: It's not safe in the Archives at all, is it.

AGENT GREY: It may not even *be* there for all we know. Anjette, get to the Vault. I want eyes on that time machine. Don't trust monitors or scanners - I want you to physically confirm with your own eyes that it's *still* in that Vault, and then make sure it doesn't *walk out*.

ANJETTE: Understood.

*Anjette exits.*

LORELEI: If we have an illegal time machine locked away somewhere... do we also have a criminal named Carissa locked away?

AGENT GREY: We do - and she's very dangerous. What do you know about the psionics?

LORELEI: The psionics were people who could affect their environment or those around them using only the power of their thoughts. Most psionics were telekinetic, but some were telepathic, and a few were even said to be precognitive or psychic.

AGENT GREY: We never got the chance to learn how psionic powers worked before Parliament declared them enemies of state. Most were tracked down and butchered by bounty hunters. But a few survived, including Carissa's family.

LORELEI: Why does Aleister Rowland want Carissa released from prison?

AGENT GREY: That's an extremely good question, since he's the man who had her thrown in prison in the first place.

LORELEI: What do you want me to do?

AGENT GREY: Interrogate Carissa. You might be immune to her psionic ability, thanks to your brain implants. I'll watch remotely and pull you out in case you get into trouble.

LORELEI: And what exactly *is* her psionic ability?

AGENT GREY: When she asks questions... she gets answers.

*Agent Grey exits as Lorelei turns to address the audience.*

LORELEI: I pulled up Carissa's file to find out where she came from and why she was in prison. She and her mother, Mary, moved to the mining colony on Vesta when she was just a little girl. Vesta's the second biggest asteroid in the belt after Ceres, but the Vesta colony was a shit hole compared to the Ceres colonies. Mary met a lady named Gunmetal Sally, who had her own little girl named Hannah, and the four of them were a happy little family, for a while anyway.

*Lorelei exits as lights come up on MARY and SALLY, mid-argument. Mary sits at a table with a glass of whiskey in front of her; she is obviously upset. Sally stands nearby, a duffel bag on the floor next to her. This family is just above poverty level on a mining colony far from Earth.*

SALLY: You let me bring practically every union organizer on Vesta into our home, knowing your daughter was more dangerous than *all* of them put together?

MARY: I told you from the beginning I didn't want those meetings in our house and you didn't listen. Sally, we have *children* living here and you brought those meetings here!

SALLY: Children may as well learn direct from their parents how to strike. The children on Ceres 3 know all about the union now that their whole colony's on strike, don't they.

MARY: You can't fight the biggest corporation in the solar system by refusing to drill, Sally! You heard the announcement - every miner there is violating contract! They're all expendable now!

SALLY: Not if the rest of the colonies follow their lead.

MARY: *What?*

SALLY: Not if we shut down production across the belt!

MARY: You can't be serious!

SALLY: What do you think we *talk* about in all our meetings, Mary?

MARY: I'm not having this conversation with you.

SALLY: No, just like you never had the conversation with *me* about your *psionic daughter!* Your *dangerous* and *illegal* psionic daughter who could get us all *killed* if anyone finds out what she can do!

*Hannah and Carissa enter. Hannah is maybe a year younger than Carissa, young enough that she's oblivious to what she's interrupting; she immediately goes to hug Sally. Carissa approaches Mary nervously, sensing the tension between Mary and Sally.*

HANNAH: Hey Mary! *She hugs Sally.* Hi, Ma! Did you hear - a whole shuttle full of kids from Ceres 3 got dumped in port this morning!

SALLY: What?

HANNAH: They're trying to put them all in the same school, like they're all best friends even though there's like 50 of 'em. Principals were looking for volunteers to adopt them.

CARISSA: Why would anyone want to adopt them?

HANNAH: Dunno, maybe you get more water or something.

CARISSA: But you'd just have to give it to them, wouldn't you?

HANNAH: Who knows, Carissa, anyway bet they don't all live long enough to complain about it.

SALLY: Hannah - why did that shuttle come here?

*Hannah freezes, realizing her mother is very serious.*

CARISSA: They're saying it was - a "catastrophic failure" of the air scrubbers on Ceres 3. *Pause.* Lost the whole population, except - a few shuttles here and there.

*Sally and Mary are both dazed by the news.*

SALLY: Weren't near enough shuttles to... I mean, that's one of the reasons they went on strike...

*Hannah notices Sally's duffel bag.*

HANNAH: You going somewhere, Ma?

SALLY: We both are. We're moving out.

HANNAH: What!

SALLY: Go up and check your pod, make sure I got all your things.

HANNAH: I don't understand.

SALLY: Hannah, we're leaving in two minutes. Anything you left behind, stays behind.

HANNAH: But why? That don't make any sense! I don't want to leave!

SALLY: Check your pod, girl, I mean it!

HANNAH: This is so *wrong!*

*Hannah dashes out.*

CARISSA: Why you leaving us, Sally?

SALLY: Because you wouldn't stop asking us *questions!* You *never* stop asking! You don't care *what* I got to say unless I'm answering your damn *questions!*

MARY: She *does* care about you and you *know* it.

CARISSA: Where you going, Sally?

SALLY: I'm *going into hiding*, you stupid girl! I'm a labor leader and they're coming for us *next*, ain't you figured out a single thing on your own in your entire fourteen years?

MARY: You don't talk to my daughter that way.

CARISSA: It's okay, Ma.

SALLY: No, it ain't okay at all, Carissa.

*Hannah re-enters with a small pack.*

SALLY: Let's go, Hannah.

*Sally exits. Hannah hugs Mary.*

HANNAH: Bye, Mary. I'll miss you lots.

MARY: I'll miss you too, sweet girl.

*On her way out, Hannah gives Carissa's arm a squeeze, then exits. Carissa briefly addresses the audience as Steven appears in the doorway in a fancy suit.*

CARISSA: So then this asshole from corporate HQ showed up who knew all about me.

STEVEN: I'm Steven Harris. I'm senior counsel for Infinitek. May I come in?

MARY: Please. Would you like whiskey?

STEVEN: Oh no, I wouldn't presume to take advantage of your ration, but thank you. So - you must be Carissa. Your mother's told us all about you.

CARISSA: What did you tell them?

MARY: The truth, ironic enough. Told them anytime my daughter asks me a question, I'm forced to answer her with the truth, whether I actually want to or not. It's like some kind of mind control.

STEVEN: She thought we might be able to help protect you.

CARISSA: And why exactly would I need *your* protection?

MARY: Folks are whispering, spreading stories about what you can do.

STEVEN: Vesta might seem remote to you, especially if you've never set foot outside the habitat. But word spreads from port to port. Someday a bounty hunter will hear those stories, and you won't be safe - not here, not anywhere in the solar system. Your wise mother saw it coming.

MARY: Couldn't let that happen to my little girl.

STEVEN: Instead she reached out to Infinitek, rightfully assuming we'd see opportunity where others do not. If what your mother says is true, you may well be exhibiting a psionic ability we've never seen before.

MARY: I'm sorry you inherited our family's curse. Skipped me, skipped your grandma... Guess I started to believe it was all dried up and you were gonna be safe and normal.

STEVEN: I'd like to experience your psionic ability for myself, Carissa, if you don't mind. Go ahead and ask me any question you like. The more personal the better, I promise I won't mind. Ask me a question that you'd never want to answer yourself, and let's see if your ability works on me.

CARISSA: Why should I?

STEVEN: Infinitek can imagine many profitable uses for your skill, Carissa.

CARISSA: What makes you think I'd ever use my skill to profit Infnittek? The same company that won't upgrade our safety gear or keep enough shuttles in port in case we have to evacuate? The same company that didn't even *try* to evacuate Ceres 3?

STEVEN: Because your skill is highly *illegal*. In fact "seditious" is the term of art. If I turn you over to the Association, they'll arrest you on sight and lock you in a deep, dark prison cell for the rest of your life. I'm offering you an alternative.

CARISSA: What alternative exactly?

STEVEN: We want you to advise our contract team, to help us negotiate trade agreements, to root out competitive espionage... there's quite a list. I'm empowered to offer you a lucrative contract on the spot, and take you back with me to corporate headquarters - pending my confirmation of your ability.

MARY: Sally was pretty hot when she left. She might tip off the Association before you ever get that contract signed.

STEVEN: That's good to know. I'll send a team from human resources to meet with Sally and smooth out the situation. So go on, Carissa, I'm sure you've had time to think of a challenging personal question for me by now.

*Carissa pauses, evaluating this man, making a decision. Then she starts probing Steven very intensely.*

CARISSA: How you gonna smooth things out with Sally?

STEVEN: A team from Infnittek human resources will find her and kill her, probably execution style, several shots from behind-

CARISSA: What will they do with her body?

STEVEN: Smuggle it out on a cargo shuttle, space it with the ship's waste disposal after we leave orbit-

CARISSA: What will happen to my mother if I go with you to your headquarters?

STEVEN: She'll be killed too, same method-

CARISSA: Why do you need to kill Sally or Ma or *anybody*?

STEVEN: Your value to the company decreases relative to the number of people who know what you can do-

CARISSA: What will happen to me if I refuse to take that "lucrative contract"?

STEVEN: We'll abduct you from your home, put you in cryo, and deliver you to Dr. Olivia Regan's R&D lab back at headquarters-

CARISSA: What if I *do* take the contract?

STEVEN: There's no contract! We just want to learn how your powers work! You'll be a lab rat for the rest of your life!

CARISSA: Where's your human resources team now?

STEVEN: At the hotel, waiting to find out if you're coming with us willingly or by force.

CARISSA: Are they monitoring us?

STEVEN: Of course not, any field transmission or recording could be discoverable by opposing counsel and permissible in court-

CARISSA: Are you carrying a weapon on your person?

STEVEN: No, I'm not-

CARISSA: That was probably a mistake.

*She produces a small futuristic pistol and points it at him.*

STEVEN: What are you going to do with that?

CARISSA: You don't ask the questions here, asshole.

MARY: Carissa! Why do you have that?

CARISSA: They arrest people like me on sight, Ma.

STEVEN: I'll appeal to the senior team. I understand your value much better now - you could be an executive candidate with the right mentor. Your demonstration was very impressive.

CARISSA: It ain't finished. Here's that personal question you wanted. Steven, are you married?

*He pauses, becoming suddenly disoriented.*

STEVEN: I... I don't remember... I can't... I must not be...

CARISSA: That looks like a wedding ring on your finger. Are you sure you're not married?

STEVEN: I have... no idea... I don't have...

CARISSA: You don't have anyone that you care about, back on Earth maybe?

STEVEN: I... I don't... why can't I remember this?

CARISSA: My skill works two ways, Steven. I can compel you to *tell* the truth... or I can compel you to *forget* the truth.

MARY: Are you kidding me, girl?

CARISSA: Sorry, Ma, you wouldn't remember me learning that little twist. Guess I shoulda used it on Sally so she wouldn't hate me so much, but I just... always hoped she loved us down deep.

MARY: She did love us, baby. I know she did.

CARISSA: Now Steven, unless you wanna forget a few other important things like your *job* and your *name* and your *reason to live*... you're gonna smuggle me out of this shit hole colony. We're a team now, you and me.

STEVEN: No matter where you take me, Infinitek will track you down.

CARISSA: Infinitek won't have to track me down. By the time I get done working my way through Infinitek, I'm gonna be their CEO.

*Lights fade on the living room. Lights up on Lorelei, addressing the audience.*

LORELEI: We later learned that Infinitek sabotaged the air filtration system on Ceres 3. Sending a message to the other colonies - and protecting its capital investment, too. Miners are interchangeable, after all, whereas putting a habitat down on an asteroid isn't cheap. But when you ask Carissa why she started her crusade against Infinitek, she always says, "They were just gonna space Ma's body with the waste disposal."

*Lights out on Lorelei. Lights up on DR. OLIVIA REGAN in her lab, as Carissa and Steven enter. Carissa addresses the audience.*

CARISSA: I got a very good start with Steven's help - and with his passphrases. Dr. Olivia Regan, head of R&D, was expecting Steven to deliver me to her top secret laboratory. I decided to oblige her with a visit.

STEVEN: Dr. Regan.

OLIVIA: Steven! I just found out you were on your way here. I haven't had time to prep the lab, but trust me, I'll be up and running as soon as the subject is delivered. *Pause.* Who's this?

STEVEN: The subject.

OLIVIA: I'm sorry - what?

STEVEN: This is the subject - the girl I retrieved from Vesta.

OLIVIA: *This* is the suspected psionic girl?

STEVEN: Oh I confirmed it - she's definitely psionic.

OLIVIA: That's ridiculous. If she's truly psionic, she should have been cryogenically frozen for delivery! The safety protocols are very clear, Steven!

STEVEN: Guess I forgot about that.

OLIVIA: How could you possibly *forget* the safety protocols?

STEVEN: I did mention she's definitely psionic, didn't I?

OLIVIA: I'm calling Security.

CARISSA: But don't you want to study me, Dr. Regan? Don't you want to find out how my powers work?

OLIVIA: Of course I do.

CARISSA: Would I be the first psionic you ever studied?

OLIVIA: No. I mean, I've studied tissue samples-

STEVEN: Corpses.

OLIVIA: *Pieces* of corpses, really, but never a live subject.

CARISSA: What do you think Security will do when they find out you've got a live psionic in your lab who's awake and fully conscious?

OLIVIA: They'll kill you.

CARISSA: But don't you want to study me, Dr. Regan?

OLIVIA: Of course I do, more than anything.

CARISSA: What if I promise to cooperate?

OLIVIA: You're just saying that to keep me from calling Security.

CARISSA: Steven, haven't I been cooperative with you?

STEVEN: Oh sure. Ever since Vesta, it's like you're escorting *me* and not the other way around.

CARISSA: Dr. Regan, let's get started right away. What tests would you like to perform on me?

OLIVIA: I... I can't remember... wait, what are you talking about? What tests?

CARISSA: Oh, I guess your tests weren't that important, never mind. Now I'm curious - Steven's corporate passphrases are director level. What level are *your* passphrases?

OLIVIA: Senior director.

CARISSA: Good for you, Olivia. And what exactly are those passphrases?

*Lights fade on the lab; Olivia and Steven exit. Carissa addresses the audience.*

CARISSA: It went like that for a couple years, worming my way up. Couldn't use my powers on all two hundred thousand workers at HQ, so I had to be strategic. Convinced the *right* people that I was the new VP in charge of whatever, and then other people started believing *those* people. I was convincing, too, cuz I knew exactly how corporate squeezed the colonies after living in the belt my whole life. Like skimming pharmaceuticals from our cargo ships to give senior execs a nice quarterly bonus - you know, real bottom line stuff. Finally Aleister Rowland himself wanted to meet the seventeen-year-old hot shot VP everyone was buzzing about, so he summoned me to his office for a private meeting. That's when my luck seemed to evaporate.

*Lights up on Aleister in his office. He looks up, noticing Carissa, as if she just entered.*

ALEISTER: Carissa. Thank you so much for coming to see me.

CARISSA: Let's make this quick. What are your executive passphrases?

ALEISTER: I'm sorry, what was the question?

CARISSA: *What are your executive passphrases?*

ALEISTER: Oh, I see what the problem is. I can't hear you at all, thanks to my noise canceling implants. Perfectly *legal* implants, I should point out.

*Agent Grey enters behind Carissa, holding a taser and trailed by the uptight & prim figure of EMILY MARCH and two Association agents.*

ALEISTER: Unlike your dangerous and highly illegal psionic ability.

AGENT GREY: You're under arrest.

*Agent Grey tases Carissa, who crumples to the floor.*

ALEISTER: Thank you, Agent Grey. Your service is much appreciated.

AGENT GREY: I don't serve *you*, you sleazy idiot. Just be glad I pay attention to your assistant Emily.

*The Association agents carry Carissa out, followed by Agent Grey.*

ALEISTER: Why does she pay attention to *you* and not me?

EMILY: Because you're a horrible human being, Aleister, did you ever think about that?

ALEISTER: Well, maybe. But you don't seem to mind.

EMILY: I told you, not in the *office*, Aleister, *please*.

*Emily exits. Aleister faces the audience.*

ALEISTER: To be fair, I wasn't actually a horrible human being. I just had inside information. Surely you're wondering, how did I know to prepare myself with noise canceling implants? That's because twenty-four hours before Carissa stormed into my office... Carissa stormed into my office.

*Carissa enters. Crucially: she is now wearing a futuristic belt around her waist or a pendant around her neck - something with a bit of gleam or bling - this is the **time machine**.*

ALEISTER: You're that sixteen-year-old VP.

CARISSA: Eighteen, actually, although when you meet me tomorrow, I'll be seventeen.

ALEISTER: What-

CARISSA: My name is Carissa.

ALEISTER: I thought our meeting was tomorrow.

CARISSA: Tomorrow you're meeting seventeen-year-old Carissa. Today you're meeting eighteen-year-old Carissa.

ALEISTER: What are you talking about?

CARISSA: I'm wearing a time machine, Aleister. I'm from the future.

*Beat.*

ALEISTER: Come on.

CARISSA: No, seriously.

ALEISTER: I don't believe you.

CARISSA: In six hours, the market is going to learn about the catastrophic explosion of the Vesta colony.

ALEISTER: What explosion?

CARISSA: It hasn't happened yet. When it does, you and your company will lose billions.

ALEISTER: Are you out of your mind?

CARISSA: Or. You can decide on a whim to sell your mining operations altogether. Tell the Board you just felt like divesting that whole branch of the business. You'll get rich.

ALEISTER: I'm already rich.

CARISSA: Not like this.

ALEISTER: And why should I believe that you're from the future and not just insane?

CARISSA: I know your entire timeline, Aleister. For instance, I know that your assistant Emily is *more* than just your assistant. She told you just last night she's fallen in love with you. In the privacy of your leisure suite, which is destroyed and reconstituted from a template every ten seconds when no one is home to prevent the deployment of surveillance dust by your competitors. Convinced yet? *Pause*. Get her in here.

ALEISTER: Emily! I need you in my office!

*Emily enters, surprised to see Carissa.*

EMILY: This *better* be work-related...

*She stops suddenly, surprised to see Carissa.*

EMILY: Who are you? Who let you in here?

CARISSA: You did.

EMILY: I don't remember letting you in here!

CARISSA: No, you wouldn't.

EMILY: Aleister, what's going on?

ALEISTER: I want you to sell all of Infinitek's mining operations in the asteroid belt.

EMILY: Are you out of your mind? Who is this woman?

ALEISTER: *Now*, Emily.

*Frustrated, Emily exits. Aleister turns to the audience.*

ALEISTER: We had just enough time to funnel the proceeds from the sale into our cloning and cybernetics divisions, deflecting any chance of suspicion, when the entire Vesta colony was destroyed in an explosion.

*Emily re-enters.*

EMILY: My god, Aleister... how did you *know*?

ALEISTER: I didn't. I took my VP's advice.

EMILY: VP? Wait - you're that teenage - your appointment with Aleister is *tomorrow*, not today!

CARISSA: Emily, do you have any contacts within Dimension Force?

EMILY: Of course! What does that have-

CARISSA: Make sure they're on hand for my appointment tomorrow. I'll have quite a surprise for everyone.

EMILY: Aleister?

ALEISTER: Do what she says.

*Frustrated, Emily exits.*

ALEISTER: What surprise are you planning for tomorrow?

CARISSA: Sorry, Aleister, but you only get to know the future if you have a time machine. Which reminds me of why I'm here *today*. Aleister, I'm going to *give* your company this time machine. It's the only one in existence. Just think of all the things Infinitex could do with it.

ALEISTER: Can't do *anything* with it. Time travel's illegal!

CARISSA: When has that ever stopped you?

ALEISTER: Ignoring local regulation is one thing. Violating the treaty is treason against the Association.

CARISSA: Ironic, since I stole this time machine from the Association.

ALEISTER: Are you crazy? Won't they come looking for it?

CARISSA: Aleister, I'm *from the future* - where they *haven't found it*.

ALEISTER: Why are you just giving it to me?

CARISSA: Actually, it's more of a trade. I just need you to do a few things for *me* first.

ALEISTER: What could I possibly do for a woman who has her own *time machine*?

CARISSA: Get noise canceling implants before you meet seventeen-year-old me tomorrow.

ALEISTER: Why?

CARISSA: Oh, all right, I'll tell - my big surprise is that I'm a powerful psionic who came here to destroy your entire company. So I need you to answer a few questions for me, starting with - what are your executive passphrases?

*Lights out on Aleister's office; Aleister and Carissa exit. Agent Grey appears in her own light.*

AGENT GREY: The next day, I arrested seventeen-year-old Carissa and hauled her off as Aleister smiled and watched. She's lucky - in the old days, we shot psionics on sight. Adult psionics, anyway, who had plenty of time to fashion their minds into razors. But Emily warned me that Carissa was just a kid. And these days, Parliament doesn't favor killing kids just for being psionic. Not when there's a chance we could train their minds into razors for Parliament. Anyway, she spent a year in solitary confinement. Then out of the blue, Aleister Rowland demanded we release her. You can understand my suspicion.

*Lights up on the Archives, where Anjette confronts a junior archivist named Ervin.*

ERVIN: Welcome to the Archives, agent. I'm Junior Archivist Ervin. What research query can I assist you with this fine day?

ANJETTE: I want to see the time machine.

ERVIN: That's out of the question.

ANJETTE: I wasn't asking a question. I want to see the time machine.

ERVIN: What I mean is - the time machine is off limits to all personnel.

ANJETTE: On the contrary, Junior Archivist Ervin - *nothing* is off limits to Dimension Force. Do you have any monitoring at all on the inside of the Vault? Any scanners that can detect disturbances inside? Any motion detectors that can detect if the time machine was being moved?

ERVIN: I'm afraid not.

ANJETTE: Then how do you know the time machine is still *in* the Vault?

ERVIN: Because it's - never been opened even once in all of recorded history?

ANJETTE: Fairly arrogant to imagine you've recorded all of history, Ervin.

ERVIN: I'm an Archivist. I take pride in our work.

ANJETTE: I want you to open the Vault for me.

ERVIN: The Vault was sealed by Management long ago. No key or combination for opening it was ever provided to the Archives.

ANJETTE: How do you know there's not some other way into the Vault that doesn't require a key or a combination?

ERVIN: That would - defeat the *purpose* of the Vault, don't you think?

ANJETTE: What would happen if someone did get into the Vault?

ERVIN: I can't - I mean, I don't -

ANJETTE: Does an alarm go off?

ERVIN: Probably?

ANJETTE: Do they train you on any kind of procedure for what to do if that alarm goes off?

ERVIN: Sure, we train frequently on how to respond to completely impossible circumstances.

ANJETTE: Really?

ERVIN: Of course not!

*Nicholas Solitude enters.*

NICHOLAS: Agent - the Vault isn't a physical object, or some steel room with a massive door. It's an artificially constructed pocket universe where the fourth dimension of time doesn't even *exist*, so even if someone got inside without setting off the alarm and tried to use the time machine, it couldn't possibly *work*.

ANJETTE: Master Archivist, I want to *see* the time machine, not *use* it. I'm not leaving until I see it. I want you to *prove* to me without question that you do still *possess* the time machine.

NICHOLAS: Tell me, agent - would you even *recognize* the time machine if you *did* see it?

*Carissa enters; she does not wear the time machine in this scene. Lorelei trails behind her.*

CARISSA: *I* would recognize the time machine.

NICHOLAS: And who exactly are *you*?

CARISSA: That's not how this works. *I'll* be asking the questions here. Master Archivist, is the time machine really stored in a pocket dimension devoid of time?

NICHOLAS: No, I was lying to try to convince this Dimension Force agent to go away.

CARISSA: Is the time machine actually locked in a physical Vault then?

NICHOLAS: Yes, in the sub-basement of the Archives.

CARISSA: And as Master Archivist, do you know how to open this Vault?

NICHOLAS: I am the caretaker of that knowledge, yes.

ERVIN: I thought no one knew how to open it!

NICHOLAS: No *Junior* Archivist knows how.

ANJETTE: Lorelei, is that Carissa?

LORELEI: Yes. Agent Grey released her into my custody.

CARISSA: One last question, Master Archivist - how exactly do I open the Vault?

*Lights out on the Archives as Lorelei faces the audience.*

LORELEI: What happened before that was - I went to visit Carissa in her prison cell. I was supposed to interrogate her, but instead I just felt - sympathy for her, I guess. She was born illegal due to her psionic ability, which she tried to hide all her life, and she grew up in a shit hole mining colony with no future ahead of her - no surprise she wanted to get a little revenge. On everybody. Like, *everybody*. I mean, I tried to talk her out of it.

*Lights up on Carissa in a prison cell, sitting on a bench. Lorelei turns to visit her in her cell.*

LORELEI: C'mon, I can understand why you hate Infnitek so much-

CARISSA: I doubt it.

LORELEI: But the Association is a clear force for good in the solar system.

CARISSA: The Association murdered every psionic they could find!

LORELEI: Because they were a threat!

CARISSA: My grandparents were not a threat to anyone.

LORELEI: But if enough people with mind control powers joined together, they could overthrow Parliament!

CARISSA: It's not a "Parliament" if they never hold elections, Lorelei! Maybe it's time Parliament was overthrown. Maybe a new government would actually *punish* Infnitek for the way it treats the colonies. I'm sure they'd have a better shot at it than the miners on Ceres 3 did.

*Beat.*

CARISSA: I'm sorry-

LORELEI: No you're right-

CARISSA: No I sound just like Gunmetal Sally. Full of slogans that get people suffocated.

*Beat.*

LORELEI: Aleister Rowland - the CEO of Infnitek - just demanded your release. Did you know that?

CARISSA: I haven't spoken to another person in over a *year*, so *no*, agent, I did not know that.

LORELEI: Why do you think he wants you released?

CARISSA: I don't know.

LORELEI: He said he's going to steal a time machine from us.

CARISSA: I thought time machines were illegal.

LORELEI: They are. But of course we have one locked away somewhere. How is he going to steal it? How does he even know we have it?

CARISSA: I don't know *anything* about it! I have no idea why you're even here.

LORELEI: They sent me to talk to you because I've had my entire organic brain replaced by cybernetic implants. This might make me immune to your psionic ability.

CARISSA: I'm not using my psionic ability.

LORELEI: I noticed - you haven't asked me anything. Go ahead - ask me a personal question.

CARISSA: That never ends well.

LORELEI: You won't learn anything that could hurt me.

CARISSA: I might be craftier than you think.

LORELEI: And I might be immune.

CARISSA: Maybe I don't want to know anything personal about you.

LORELEI: That sounds like a lie.

*Carissa eyes Lorelei warily for a beat.*

CARISSA: Why did you get your brain replaced by implants?

LORELEI: What happened was, I grew up on this mining colony-

CARISSA: Really? Which one?

LORELEI: Ceres 3.

CARISSA: No shit?

LORELEI: No shit.

CARISSA: Were you there when - I mean, obviously you weren't there, but-

LORELEI: I was on a field trip with my class that day, so we took the shuttle to the nearest colony and begged them to let us in.

CARISSA: You came to Vesta.

LORELEI: I did.

CARISSA: *I'm* from Vesta.

LORELEI: Small asteroid belt, huh.

CARISSA: No kidding.

LORELEI: Anyway, I didn't care that my parents were dead, or my brothers, I didn't care that I had no money or no place to go. All I cared about back then was Jaxxer Kwee.

CARISSA: Never heard of Jaxxer Kwee.

LORELEI: Best singer on Ceres 3. I was devoted to her, I had all her music with me on my tablet, I thought okay, it sucks that Jaxxer Kwee is dead but I'm gonna make sure her music lives on. But then I passed out, I almost died because the shuttle nearly ran out of air, because the port officer was being a jerk about letting us through customs, and then I woke up in medical, and my tablet was gone. My *music* was gone. So... a girl I knew from school took me to see this totally off-the-grid black market dude...

CARISSA: Trick Start, right? The Pirate King. How did that go?

LORELEI: He was not impressed by my little sob story about my missing tablet.

*Lights up on TRICK START, a steampunk-y engineer, and his first mate AIREE, who are working at a bench. BRADLEY, a nicely dressed young man, is sitting on the bench, hooked up to various monitors and probes etc. Lorelei smoothly transitions to this scene, joined by Hannah, who is a couple years older than when we saw her last; they wait patiently for Trick Start's attention.*

AIREE: We got a clean signal.

TRICK START: Okay, let's see if the upgrade took. Bradley, can you hear me?

BRADLEY: Yes, I can hear you.

TRICK START: Tell me about the time you first met Airee.

BRADLEY: Oh, it was love at first sight. I was fresh off the printer, and our eyes locked, and I realized we were meant to be together. Isn't that right, Airee?

AIREE: Uh huh, you betcha.

BRADLEY: She took my hand, and as I stood up for the first time - oh, excuse me for a moment. *Switching to an announcer voice:* Coming soon, the pay per view event of the year, as the Crusher himself, Kingston Roderick, and his fleet of overclocked battle droids face off in the arena against the deadly nanoswarms of Susie Singularity! An immersive experience you'll never forget, only on Holomax Virtual Sports! *Switching back to his normal voice:* I'm sorry, what were we talking about?

TRICK START: Go back to sleep, Bradley.

BRADLEY: I'd love to! *His head drops to his chest.*

HANNAH: What's wrong with your Bradley?

AIREE: He's ad-supported.

HANNAH: Can't you just install an ad-blocker?

AIREE: Ad-blocker - are you kidding? That's military stuff.

HANNAH: He's refurbished, right? Just roll him back to the first edition OS. They gave up trying to patch first edition. I mean, first edition was so full of holes, you can actually run the Charlotte OS on him. It's kinda mean, but it's pretty hilarious.

TRICK START: Well, look at the smarty-pants. *To Airee:* Roll him back to the first edition.

AIREE: You think?

HANNAH: So Lorelei - this is Trick Start, the Pirate King, and his first mate, Airee.

AIREE: I prefer the term "Chief Officer."

TRICK START: I prefer the term "hey you get over here."

HANNAH: Lorelei's bunking with me for a while in the dorm. She's one of the refugees from Ceres 3.

AIREE: Ohh. Girl, I'm so sorry.

HANNAH: I thought you could help her.

TRICK START: Is that so. What's your problem, Lorelei?

LORELEI: I lost a bunch of music when my tablet got stolen while I was unconscious.

AIREE: Didn't you have a backup?

LORELEI: Colony servers never came back online.

AIREE: Didn't your colony servers have a backup?

LORELEI: Uh, have you seen the rates they charge for off-world data transfers? No way we could pay like that just to back up our stupid little servers. I mean, the union went on strike for *reasons* right?

HANNAH: I'm guessing Lorelei's memories are probably still stored in her brain somewhere, like her brain got a hard reboot when she almost died, and after that she just lost the pointer to those memories or something.

LORELEI: Because I swear I knew every Jaxxer Kwee song by heart. I gotta get those memories back before I lose 'em forever, cuz I can't help it, I just keep piling rotten new memories on top of the old ones.

AIREE: Okay, rollback's complete.

TRICK START: Let's give it a shot. Wake up, Bradley.

*Bradley's head rises & his eyes open. He turns to Airee.*

BRADLEY: Hey Airee, quick question for you - can you confirm that we live in an existentially pointless universe, devoid of all meaning, in which the fallacy of human connection is the ethically reprehensible driving engine that powers the delusion of civilization?

AIREE: Umm... why do you ask?

BRADLEY: No reason. Hey, I know you wanted to see a movie tonight, but how about we blow ourselves out an airlock onto the icy, airless surface of Vesta instead?

AIREE: No, Bradley. I would prefer to see a movie.

BRADLEY: Fine. Whatever.

AIREE: Go to sleep, Bradley.

*Bradley's back to sleep now.*

AIREE: Why is my Bradley suicidal?

TRICK START: Dunno. It's still kind of an improvement though, yeah?

AIREE: Um, no.

*Trick Start puts down the piece of hardware he's been dabbling with and finally gives Lorelei a close look.*

TRICK START: I'm gonna assume you already searched every propped up little machine on the entire public net...

HANNAH: Of course she did, she ain't slow.

TRICK START: You scanned every puny little tightbeam coming back from every tiny little tugboat that thinks the rest of the solar system cares in the slightest about their boring tugboat lives...

HANNAH: If it's indexed, we scanned it!

TRICK START: You dug through one hundred percent of the telemetry coming back from every single satellite with a live battery from the Sun all the way out past the Oort cloud, and no matter how you refined your query, you did not find a single trace of Jaxxer Kwee?

LORELEI: Right.

AIREE: And none of the other refugees brought a tablet with Jaxxer Kwee songs on it?

LORELEI: Nope. I mean - she was kind of underground.

AIREE: Is that some kind of miner joke?

LORELEI: What?

TRICK START: Okay, well, we could definitely give you an upgrade that'll fix the problem.

LORELEI: Really?

AIREE: We can have it ready in like five minutes if I go warm up the printer.

LORELEI: Is it a brain implant? Is there like a surgery? Can we do the surgery today?

TRICK START: No, where did you, did they actually cut people open where you're from? Because out here in civilization, we like to use this thing called "science". Just kidding, I don't know the first thing about science, I just reverse engineer tech and sell it on the black market.

AIREE: So, we load forensic analysis software onto a pill full of nanites, which you swallow, and the nanites run the software in your brain-

TRICK START: "Subjective computation", it's the hot new thing.

AIREE: -and suddenly you remember absolutely every single memory that ever left a chemical trace since you were born.

LORELEI: Oh my god.

TRICK START: Let's be clear, you're gonna get *all* your memories back and you ain't gonna forget, including some that maybe should stay forgotten. Like how good your life was back on Ceres 3.

LORELEI: But I would *remember* those *songs* right?

AIREE: Your brain doesn't record every detail of your life in perfect fidelity. They might sound like ghosts.

TRICK START: And you'll eventually lose all the organic brain matter in your skull because the nanites self-replicate and where do you think they get the caloric energy to *run* that software? So that might be a thing or whatever, although usually people don't notice the difference.

LORELEI: I want it.

TRICK START: Don't come free.

HANNAH: Ceres 3 accounts are all frozen. Could be years before she sees her parents' wages.

*Trick Start and Airee exchange a quick glance. Then:*

TRICK START: I guess you're gonna owe me a favor, Lorelei.

LORELEI: I'm good for it.

TRICK START: Yeah... I reckon you are.

*Lights fade on Trick Start, as Lorelei turns back to Carissa.*

LORELEI: That was the first of many implants. Combinations even the Pirate King hadn't seen before. Got so much computation happening in my skull that I became the youngest agent in Dimension Force history. Does that answer your question?

CARISSA: Maybe. How do those Jaxxer Kwee songs sound?

LORELEI: Like she's singing at me from the other side of a big steel door. Better than nothing I guess.

CARISSA: Worth giving up all your organic brain matter?

LORELEI: Some days, sure.

CARISSA: Do you feel immune to me?

LORELEI: I don't feel anything unusual.

CARISSA: I guess that just means you're a good person.

LORELEI: What's that supposed to mean?

CARISSA: There are people out there who just *lie*, like it's second nature. They can always tell when my power is working on them. They can't stop it from working and they just totally freak out inside even while they're telling me the truth, because that's just how it works. But then some people, like - my Ma - it took her a long time to realize it was working on her, because - she was the kind of person who always preferred to tell the truth, just not - all the time maybe.

LORELEI: And you think I'm one of those people?

CARISSA: I can't tell what you are.

LORELEI: I would have told you that story anyway.

CARISSA: I want you to trust me.

LORELEI: That won't be easy.

CARISSA: I can help you stop Aleister Rowland.

LORELEI: How can you help us stop him? Do you know what he's planning?

CARISSA: No, but I could go to him, pretend I'm grateful, secretly report back what I learn.

LORELEI: Why would we ever let you run off on your own to corporate HQ? How would we know you were reporting back the truth and not just some lie that Aleister wants us to believe?

CARISSA: You know, you ask a lot of questions.

LORELEI: Technically I'm interrogating you.

CARISSA: Let me out of here. I swear, I can help.

LORELEI: I don't have the authority to release you.

CARISSA: But your boss does. The woman who arrested me. And I assume she's listening.

LORELEI: Of course she is.

CARISSA: Then listen to me, both of you. I can get the truth out of Aleister. That's what I *do*. But first, I need to see the time machine for myself, so I can convince Aleister I know what I'm talking about...

*Lights out on Lorelei and Carissa. Lights up on Agent Grey elsewhere on stage, facing the audience.*

AGENT GREY: I should have been suspicious of how quickly Carissa formulated her plan. It sounded so perfect when she described it. But she doesn't just compel you to tell the truth. She also compels you to *forget* the truth. Which meant she made everyone who came into contact with her forget what she was doing. Which is how she very quickly proceeded to execute her real plan - a plan she'd actually been developing for quite some time.

*Lights up - we are back in the Archives. Present are Lorelei, Anjette, Nicholas, and Ervin, all of whom seem to be in a daze. A loud alarm is going off in the background. Agent Grey enters the scene.*

AGENT GREY: Shut that alarm off!

*The alarm goes off.*

NICHOLAS: I don't understand - what's happened?

AGENT GREY: Carissa opened the Vault.

ANJETTE: That's not possible! She was just here with us!

AGENT GREY: She's been gone for the last five minutes, actually.

NICHOLAS: But I'm the only one with the combination!

AGENT GREY: Which you gave to her, five minutes ago.

ERVIN: She might still be inside the Vault! Maybe we can stop her before she leaves the Archives!

AGENT GREY: She's already gone. Surveillance dust shows she went back in time and walked out of here an hour before Anjette first arrived.

ERVIN: But I was sitting right here on duty! I would have seen her!

AGENT GREY: You did see her... and then you *forgot* seeing her. She stole a shuttle and disabled the transponder. We have no idea where she is now.

ANJETTE: So she can travel through time *and* she's got multiple dangerous psionic powers... how can we possibly catch her?

*Lights out on the Archives. Lights up on Trick Start at his workbench, tinkering with weird hardware. Airee is working nearby. Carissa enters; in this scene, she is wearing the time machine.*

CARISSA: What's a Pirate King like you still doing in a shit hole mining colony like Vesta?

TRICK START: Reverse engineering other people's technology. Obviously.

CARISSA: Got a job for you.

*She hands him the time machine. Airee looks on, curious.*

CARISSA: I need you to reverse engineer this. I want the specs for how to build one in a lab.

AIREE: Can't you just print a copy?

CARISSA: I don't want a copy - I want full engineering specs for building it from actual materials.

AIREE: Dare I ask what it is?

CARISSA: Nope.

TRICK START: How soon you need these specs?

CARISSA: You got twelve hours.

TRICK START: Twelve hours? Girl, that's gonna cost you.

CARISSA: Check your account. Infinitek just wired you a balloon payment. That's the up front.

AIREE: You're working for Infinitek?

CARISSA: I'm *stealing* from Infinitek.

TRICK START: Infinitek money will be traceable.

CARISSA: Not when you're using the CEO's passphrases. Trust me, I got this. I'll be back in twelve hours for my specs.

TRICK START: What happens in twelve hours?

CARISSA: I'm gonna blow this entire colony up.

*Beat.*

TRICK START: It is kind of a shit hole, isn't it?

CARISSA: Got your own boat I assume.

TRICK START: I'm the Pirate King, girl - got my own fleet.

AIREE: Hey Bradley!

*Bradley enters, now dressed like a member of the pirate crew.*

BRADLEY: How can I be of service?

AIREE: Mobilize the crew. Get the Pirate King's corvette warmed up. Tell the fleet we're preparing to rendezvous in twelve hours.

BRADLEY: You got it. We taking the lab gear too?

TRICK START: I'm going to need the lab operational right up until the last minute.

BRADLEY: Roger that. I'll make sure the corvette is cleared for launch.

AIREE: Boss, you need me here or you got this?

TRICK START: I got this.

AIREE: Bradley, maybe you can help me pack up my personal effects?

BRADLEY: I imagine I can do that for you.

*Airee takes Bradley's hand and they exit.*

CARISSA: You got room on your boat for my Ma? Won't feel safe sending her with anyone else.

TRICK START: Reckon I can find her a berth.

*Lights out on Trick Start, as Carissa faces the audience.*

CARISSA: Hadn't seen Ma since my arrest. She couldn't afford to take time off from her new job to come look for me. Not like I got a trial anyway. As far as she knew, she was never going to see me again. Which - surprise!

*Lights up on Mary at her table, as Carissa enters.*

MARY: My God - Carissa!

*Mother rushes to embrace Carissa, who responds warmly.*

MARY: What are you doing here? Did they let you go?

CARISSA: Not exactly.

MARY: What does that mean? Are you still in trouble?

CARISSA: Ma - listen to me. I'm about to do something big and I want to make sure you're safe. But you have to trust me. I know that's been hard in the past - because of who I am, and what I can do. But listen, I'm not asking any questions here, and I swear you're gonna remember everything that happens today. I just need you to trust me - just for today, if that's all you can manage. Tell me you understand.

MARY: I think so.

CARISSA: You need to contact Sally.

MARY: She and all the other union leaders are in hiding after what happened on Ceres 3.

CARISSA: But you can still find her, I know you can. You tell her - in twelve hours, this colony is going to be vaporized in an explosion, and they need to evacuate all the workers before it happens.

MARY: What are you even talking about, Carissa? How can you know that?

CARISSA: Because I'm the one who planted the thermite charges. Only thing corporate cares about is their "capital investments." Let's how they feel when their entire operation on Vesta is nothing more than a smoking blast crater you can see from Earth.

MARY: But you'll kill *everyone*-

CARISSA: No, Ma, I done the math - plenty of room on the boats in port to get all the workers out safe, but they gotta move *fast*, and they gotta move *quiet*. Cuz there *ain't* room for corporate flunkies on those boats - we can't take any smug little lawyers or accountants or shift supervisors or security thugs. They all lived large here on our backs for decades and that was good enough. Universe ain't gotta keep providing for their cocktail parties forever.

*Lights out on Mary as she exits. Carissa addresses the audience.*

CARISSA: Vesta was the very explosion I used to prove to Aleister Rowland that I was from the future, if you recall. Infinitek sure enough made a mint on the sale of their mining operations, which I promptly siphoned

away into a trust fund for the Ceres 3 refugees, using the executive passphrases I convinced Aleister to give me. Now there was just one question left to answer: who built the time machine in the first place?

*Lights out on Carissa. Lights up on Aleister in his own light.*

ALEISTER: ...unless, of course, you meet my single demand: release Carissa from your prison. I will contact you again in twenty-four hours.

*Lights up broader on the stage as Emily enters.*

EMILY: Aleister - your message is popping up all over the darknet! What the hell was that all about? You can't just threaten the Association!

ALEISTER: Trust me, Emily, this is going to pay off huge for us.

EMILY: One of our top R&D scientists is here to see you. She says it's extremely urgent.

*Olivia barges in with a small futuristic case under her arm.*

OLIVIA: Sorry for the interruption, sir, but your message to the Association popped up on the darknet-

ALEISTER: Are you monitoring the darknet with corporate resources, Miss...

OLIVIA: It's *Doctor* Olivia Regan, and yes of course I am, which is why I'm here. I've been working on a secret project for the past several months.

ALEISTER: Secret from me?

OLIVIA: Secret from you, secret from the Board of Directors, secret from everyone else at the company. Because it's highly illegal research.

ALEISTER: Which means it had better be highly profitable?

OLIVIA: Of course, of course.

*Olivia hands Aleister the briefcase. He opens it, revealing the time machine inside.*

ALEISTER: What am I looking at?

OLIVIA: Sir - it's a time machine. Well, to be fair, it's a prototype. I just finished it literally hours ago.

ALEISTER: Did you invent this yourself?

OLIVIA: No, I was handed very detailed engineering build specs when the project was authorized.

ALEISTER: And who exactly authorized the project?

OLIVIA: The VP of our division - Carissa - she had CEO passphrases. As far as finance is concerned, *you* authorized the project.

*Agent Grey and Anjette enter, holding sci-fi weapons which they aim at the assorted crew. Agent Grey quickly secures the time machine, wresting it from a stunned Aleister's grasp.*

AGENT GREY: Mr. Rowland, why am I not surprised to find you authorizing development of the single most dangerous technology known to the Association?

ANJETTE: Aleister Rowland, you're under arrest for treason against the Association. Put your hands where I can see them.

ALEISTER: You honestly think you can just walk into *my office*, and march me out of here like a common criminal?

ANJETTE: Pretty much.

ALEISTER: We have an *army of lawyers* that will block you with a *thousand* injunctions. Your *grandchildren* will be facing injunctions-

EMILY: Infinitek won't defend you. The Board of Directors has fired you, effective immediately, for authorizing treason in the company's name. They're in emergency session right now, negotiating with Carissa to get the CEO passphrases back. She could destroy the company before we can crack our own system encryption and shut her down.

ANJETTE: What's stopping her?

OLIVIA: The CEO position is open and she's a talented VP. She probably wants the job.

ALEISTER: That's crazy! Look - she's a *criminal!* She used the time machine *repeatedly!* Why aren't you arresting *her*?

AGENT GREY: We've issued an arrest warrant, but apparently an army of lawyers are blocking us with a thousand injunctions. Anjette, get him out of here.

*Anjette marches Aleister out. Agent Grey turns to Olivia.*

AGENT GREY: Dr. Regan. You're going to help me wipe every instance of those build specs from existence. If you hold out on me... if you hide a copy of that data *anywhere*, and some time machine turns up somewhere down the road... I will bury you deep below the surface of the coldest moon in the solar system, where you will shriek silently in frozen horror for the next several eons. Am I understood?

OLIVIA: Yeah, that's pretty evocative.

AGENT GREY: Emily, where is this Board meeting?

EMILY: It's virtual. The Board never meets in person. Carissa could be anywhere - she's using executive encryption to mask her location, just like the rest of the Board.

AGENT GREY: So she escapes again... she's out there somewhere on the loose, and she still has the time machine.

*Lights out on Aleister's office. Lights up on Lorelei, facing the audience.*

LORELEI: Carissa didn't want to be CEO. She just wanted justice... not some token cash settlement covered by insurance that wouldn't even be a rounding error on Infinitek's balance sheet, but something that could put a gun to their heads and teach the whole system a real lesson. And so, when the next wave of settlers left Earth to repopulate Ceres 3, they left as the *owners* and *operators* of Ceres 3 - the first free colony of the inner system, independent signatory to the treaty, under full protection of the Association. At the end of this whole escapade, I found Carissa right where I had first met her.

*Lights up on Carissa, back in her cell, Lorelei turning to face her. The time machine is on the floor between them.*

LORELEI: You just let yourself back into your cell?

CARISSA: I wouldn't want you and your boss to think you couldn't trust me.

LORELEI: Smooth.

CARISSA: It *is* smooth. I got to be CEO of Infinitek, for a few hours anyway. I gave Aleister the time machine, just like I promised him. I helped you stop him, just like I promised you.

LORELEI: You sat in prison for over a year with no visitors.

CARISSA: I had to get myself locked in prison or I never would have gotten near the Vault with the time machine. Anyway, I did have one visitor. She came by quite a bit.

LORELEI: You visited *yourself* in prison.

CARISSA: Sure did. We cooked up quite a plan together, didn't we. Only thing I feel guilty about... just a sliver of guilt, mind you... is letting people die when I blew up the colony on Vesta.

LORELEI: No one died on Vesta.

CARISSA: What are you talking about? I did the math...

LORELEI: So did I. And I'm doing something about it.

*She puts on the time machine, and lights transition to Trick Start at his workbench. He is studying the disassembled pieces of the time machine that Carissa left with him, as Lorelei turns to face him wearing the time machine she put on in Carissa's prison cell.*

TRICK START: Why am I not surprised? Two ghosts from the past on the same day. What's my favorite cyborg doing back on Vesta?

LORELEI: Carissa told you she's going to blow the colony up, I assume?

TRICK START: Couldn't say really.

LORELEI: There aren't enough boats in port to evacuate the whole colony.

TRICK START: Tough break.

LORELEI: Mobilize the pirate fleet for a rescue mission, Trick Start. With your ships, there's more than enough room to get everyone to safety.

TRICK START: Last I heard, workers are all getting out. Why should I lift a finger to help a bunch of corporate lackies escape a colony they couldn't be bothered to run properly in the first place?

LORELEI: Because it's the right thing to do. Because I'm *asking* you.

TRICK START: Last I heard, you owe me a favor, not the other way round.

LORELEI: Listen, Trick - the device you're currently reverse engineering is highly illegal.

TRICK START: The same illegal device you're wearing? Let me guess - it ain't illegal for Dimension Force?

LORELEI: Something like that. As a Dimension Force agent, I'm compelled by oath to arrest you right now for possessing that device.

TRICK START: Mind telling me what it is?

LORELEI: It's a time machine, Trick. And you're committing *treason* against the Association for violating the *treaty*. Parliament *disappears* people for this kind of thing.

TRICK START: You'd actually arrest me?

LORELEI: No. As a *favor* to you, I *won't*. And now we're even.

TRICK START: I reckon that's true.

LORELEI: But if you want to bank one more favor from a highly ranked Dimension Force agent - which I think we can agree is a lot more valuable than a favor from a scared little refugee girl - do the right thing and mobilize your fleet for a rescue mission.

TRICK START: It's that big brain of yours. I made you too smart, and now you've outwitted me. Fine, I'll summon the fleet. I assume you're taking this highly illegal time machine back with you to the Association?

LORELEI: No, I'm not. Carissa's coming back for it. You need to finish what you're doing, because she really needs those build specs.

*Lights out on Trick Start as Lorelei turns back to Carissa.*

CARISSA: But how did you know to go *there* of all places?

LORELEI: When you guessed the name “Trick Start, the Pirate King” - it was pretty obvious he’d be the only person you trusted to help you. But you should know - you also had *my* help. In the Vault, when you went off-plan and made everyone forget five minutes so you could escape with the time machine... that was the first time you tried using your powers on me. In case you’re at all curious... turns out I sure enough *am* immune to your abilities.

CARISSA: Nice. So you could have stopped me right then and there. Why didn’t you?

LORELEI: Guess I just trusted you. Seems like I made the right choice?

CARISSA: Seems like. *Pause*. What are you gonna do with the time machine?

LORELEI: We’re going to package it up all nice and pretty with a message attached... the story of all that happened with this time machine, and a warning about all that *could* have happened if we hadn’t been so conscientious or whatever. Then we’re going to send it on a one-way trip back to the beginning of history, before the treaty, back when Management was just figuring things out. And we’re going to politely suggest, “Hey, you might want to make time travel illegal... and you might want to build a Vault for this very time machine.”

CARISSA: So that I can steal it someday and provide them with the aforementioned demonstration of just how dangerous it is.

LORELEI: Exactly.

CARISSA: Smooth.

LORELEI: Yeah. *Pause*. So why’d you *really* lock yourself back in your prison cell?

CARISSA: Because... I really was going to let those people die on Vesta. And maybe you saved their lives, but... that still makes me a mass murderer at heart. Even if they really, truly, deeply deserved it... I’ve got a lot of thinking to do about what kind of person I turned into when I wasn’t paying attention. May as well do it here.

LORELEI: Mind if I come visit on occasion?

CARISSA: I’d like that, agent.

LORELEI: I’m Lorelei.

CARISSA: I know.

*Lorelei turns to go, but Carissa stops her.*

CARISSA: Before you leave... I thought you might want to hear something.

*Carissa produces a thin black hand-held computer tablet.*

CARISSA: Some pretty good tunes on this thing. Although - this song "Sweet Spot Super Hot", those are some pretty racy lyrics for a kid.

LORELEI: Is that my tablet? Are *you* the one who stole it?

CARISSA: You might've had a visitor while you were unconscious in Medical. That visitor might've been me. What do you say, agent - wanna hear a little Jaxxer Kwee?

*Lorelei nods. Carissa activates the tablet, and we start hearing a beautiful, futuristic pop song. Lorelei closes her eyes, smiles at the sound, as the lights fade to black.*

*THE END*