

# Glitches Part I

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Submitted: September 25, 2005

Updated: April 28, 2006

*Strange things are happening on Lyoko and Jeremy suspects the government might be involved. That's when a new girl arrives at Jadic, and Jeremy thinks that the timing of her arrival is more than just coincidence.*

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# 1 - Glitches

It was the fifteenth of May, a Friday, and summer break was just around the corner at Kadic Boarding School which, unfortunately, also meant the end-of-school-year exams. While one half of the school remained indoors, studying for the exams, the other half, which would usually include Odd and Ulrich, would be outside goofing off and doing whatever they pleased. However, to Jeremy's surprise, he could not find his two friends anywhere, or at least, anywhere besides their dorms.

On any other normal day, you would never, I mean NEVER, find Odd and Ulrich in their dorm room studying, but both of them knew that these exams were important and worth fifty percent of their final grade. So for the last two days, Ulrich and Odd had spent their freetime studying, which Odd, of course, had advised strongly against.

Jeremy walked in to find Odd and Ulrich sitting on their beds, each with the same copy of "World History" books in their hands.

"Wow! I'm impressed Ulrich. You actually got Odd to study" Jeremy said.

Odd shot him a dirty look.

"If you're just here to insult us, then I suggest you leave. We've still got a lot of studying to do" Ulrich replied, without even looking away from his book.

"Actually, I've been looking for you two. Yumi is waiting for us down by the factory" said Jeremy.

This got Ulrich's attention as he looked up at Jeremy, worriedly.

"Why? Is it Xana?" Odd asked, rather excitedly.

"No, I don't think so, but . . ."

"What?" Ulrich asked curiously.

Jeremy gave a deep sigh. "A few days ago, I was working on Eileda's antivirus when all of the sudden, glitches started popping up everywhere. I had no idea what was going on. At first, I thought it was Xana. But then, Eileda contacted me and told me that something strange was happening on Lyoko."

"What? What's happening?" asked Odd, frantically.

Jeremy paused for a moment.

“She says that strange things are happening to the landmarks. In the mountain region, she says she saw an entire mountain just dematerialize, and in the forest region, she saw at least ten or twenty trees all bent out of shape, like someone is virtually distorting them.”

Ulrich and Odd just sat motionless and staring up at Jeremy in shock.

“That’s not all. The other day, Eileda was in the polar region, and a giant black hole appeared out of nowhere and almost destroyed one of the towers. Luckily though, it disappeared after only ten seconds.”

Ulrich stood up and closed his book.

“Then we’ve got to go to Lyoko and find out what’s going on!”

Jeremy nodded his head, and Ulrich and Odd followed him out the door.

## 2 - New Student

After successfully sneaking past Jim and cutting through the forest unseen, Jeremy, Odd, and Ulrich reached the hidden entrance to the underground passage that led to the factory. Jeremy opened the latch, and the three of them climbed down the ladder.

Yumi stood halfway across the bridge waiting for Jeremy to arrive along with Odd and Ulrich. She glanced at her watch again. They were late, and it wasn't like Jeremy to be late.

She was just about to set off and find them herself, when she heard footsteps coming from the forest. Sure enough, Odd and Ulrich came running out of the bushes toward her, Jeremy following slowly behind them.

"It's about time you got here, I was just about to come find you myself" Yumi said impatiently.

Both Ulrich and Odd ignored her.

"Sorry, I had trouble finding them" Jeremy apologized.

Yumi looked at Ulrich. "So, where were you?"

Ulrich looked away. "In our room, studying."

She gave a hearty laugh. "That's a first, you studying!"

"Can we get back to business now?" Jeremy gave Yumi a serious look.

Yumi stopped laughing.

"Thank you. Okay, you all know why were here, so let's see if we can go help Eileda." Jeremy led the group into the factory.

Meanwhile, back at the school, the principal was busy shuffling some papers around in hopes of finishing his agenda. After he had tucked a few letters away in his folder, he reached into one of the drawers and pulled out the student profiles. He set the folder on his desk, and then reached for the unopened envelope he had received just this morning. He peeled it open, took out the letter, and began reading it.

*Dear Kadic Boarding School,*

*We would like to enroll our daughter, Maxine Johnson, for the 2005 academic year. Our careers require constant traveling and have brought us to one home and school after another, and each one was a disaster. But now, we have decided to settle down permanently right here in France. We have read many articles and reviews about this school, and we feel that it would be best for our daughter if she remained in a more social environment. We hope you will accept.*

*Sincerely, Joseph and Mary Johnson*

Attached to the letter were a complete record of Maxine Amelia Johnson and a check of five-thousand U.S. dollars made out to the school.

The principal read the letter again and reviewed the Johnson girl's profile.

Finally, he took out a rubber stamp from his pocket, dabbed it in ink, and firmly pressed it onto each paper.

“Maxine Johnson, welcome to Kadic Boarding School.”

### 3 - Hacker Identified

Yumi, Jeremy, Odd, and Ulrich rode the giant elevator down to the central-computer room. As soon as they reached the floor deep below the factory, the doors spread open, and Jeremy entered the room.

Then, Yumi, Odd, and Ulrich rode further down to the room just below, where the virtualization vents were ready and waiting for them.

As they each entered their own vent, Jeremy typed in the coordinates and immediately contacted Eileda to tell her where to meet the other three.

“Eileda? Are you there?” Jeremy spoke into the mini-microphone, linked to the computer.

Eileda instantly appeared on-screen.

“Hello, Jeremy” she replied.

“Eileda, I told them about what happened on Lyoko. They're on their way. Meet them in the forest region, alright?”

“Thanks, Jeremy. There haven't been as many strange occurrences lately, but still, something doesn't feel right.”

“It's okay, Eileda. We'll find out what the problem is and fix it. I promise.”

Eileda gave a warm smile.

“Okay guys, get ready for virtualization in three . . . two . . . one!” Jeremy pressed the key, and Yumi, Odd, and Ulrich were sent off to Lyoko.

Eileda sat patiently on top of a moss-covered boulder, waiting for Ulrich, Yumi, and Odd to arrive.

Suddenly, the three teens materialized right in front of her and she hopped off the rock and ran over to them.

“Hey! Eileda!” Odd waved to her as she came over to greet them.

But Eileda wasn't her usual, happy self. Her eyes looked sad and weary, and her smile had completely disappeared.

“Look around” she said to them.

The four of them stared in utter shock. They were surrounded by hundreds of trees, all bent way out of shape. Some trees twisted and wound around other trees, while others were completely bent over or broken in half. The entire forest region looked like one of those dark, creepy forests that you read in horror novels. No wonder Eileda was so upset. Her entire home was being turned upside-down.

"It's gotten worse in the past few days. I don't know what's happening or how to stop it." Eileda seemed almost close to tears as she said this.

"Don't worry, Eileda" Ulrich said comfortingly. "We're going to get things back to the way they were. You'll see!"

Just then, Jeremy's voice came on.

"Guys, I think I've already found out who's doing this."

"Really Jeremy?" Eileda cried joyfully.

"I tracked them down using the new antivirus system I just installed. According to my data, the virtual identity of the hacker is MyAngelX."

"Well, that helps!" Ulrich called out, sarcastically. "We still don't know the hacker's true identity!"

"I wasn't finished Ulrich!" Jeremy retorted. "Another useful aspect of my antivirus system is that it can track down the hacker's real identity using past records of hacking, e-mailing, and even internet use. So, whether he likes it or not, I know who he is."

"Who is he, Jeremy?" Yumi asked.

"He's a carpenter in France and goes by the name of Josh J. Shonnep."

## 4 - Mr. Johnson

While all this was happening back at the factory, Josh J. Shonnep, or rather, Joseph Johnson, was sitting at his home computer, his finger tips pounding the keyboard anxiously while his wife, Mary, was sound asleep in their bedroom.

Joseph and his wife had been working on this case for nearly three years since they left the CIA. They had made all the calls to all the right people, had installed an advanced internet system, which was only used by him, Mary, and a few top-rank government agents, that gave them unlimited access to every computer in the world.

And they still had nothing.

Suddenly, he heard footsteps coming from the hallway. He quickly cleared the screen, and pulled up the other site he had saved in case of any intrusions.

His daughter poked her head out from behind the door.

“Dad, what are you doing up so late?” she asked drowsily.

“Hi sweetie. I'm just taking care of some last minute business.”

“Daddy, I thought you were done with work.”

“I am sweetie. Don't worry, just go back to sleep” he said reassuringly.

“Okay, but don't stay up too late” she called out as she turned and headed back down the hall.

“I promise, Max. Now get some sleep, you have school in the morning.”

As Max headed back down the hallway, she stopped and tip-toed back toward the office.

She cautiously peeked through the doorway, and tried to see what her father was doing. To her disappointment, the computer screen read in big, bold letters, “**CIA: World-wide Internet Glitches**”.

Max turned back, and shook her head somberly. “*He promised*” she thought to herself. “*He said it was over and that we could be a normal family again.*”

Once again, Max walked down the dark, lonely hallway tired and heartbroken

## 5 - The Plan

Yumi, Jeremy, Odd and Ulrich didn't get back to their rooms until about ten o' clock at night. So, by the time Odd and Ulrich both unlocked the door and entered their dorm room, they were both exhausted. They had spent the entire day investigating the virtual distortions on Lyoko, while Jeremy had sat comfortably in his chair pressing random keys with his face glued to the computer. But the worse part was that neither Odd nor Ulrich had gotten any studying done.

"Do you ever think that maybe Jeremy's a little over-obsessed with protecting Eileda?" Odd asked wearily, and collapsed on his bed.

"You know how he is" Ulrich replied in equal exhaust. "I would like to think that he overdoes it sometimes too, but the reality of it is that it's still the right thing to do."

Odd gave a deep sigh. "Yeah, I guess you're right."

"Right now," Ulrich said as he kicked off his shoes and slid under his covers "I just want to get some sleep."

But Odd had already beat Ulrich to it as he looked over at him and saw that he was sound asleep and already snoring.

Ulrich smiled, laid his head against his pillow, and closed his eyes.

The next morning at around seven, Yumi awoke to her alarm clock's usual ear-splitting ring.

She reached out from under her covers and grumpily pounded on the clock until it stopped its consistent blaring.

Yumi slowly sat up and rubbed her eyes.

"Ugh! Another Monday" she groaned.

It took Yumi no less than fifteen minutes to shower, dress, pack her bag, and shut the front door of her house behind her as she headed down the sidewalk towards the school.

By the time she reached the front gates of Kadic Boarding School, it seemed ten or twenty kids had all gathered in little groups, each talking and trading the latest gossips.

The biggest of all the groups, of course, was crowded around Sissy, staring and listening intently to what she had to say.

"I know for a fact that she's from America" Sissy said in a dramatic monotone.

Some kids gasped, and others just continued whispering into other peoples' ears.

Yumi, however, couldn't care less about what Sissy was carrying on about. All she could think about was Eileda, and what was happening to Lyoko. Hopefully, Jeremy would be the one to reassure her that there was something they could to stop it.

Ulrich, Jeremy, and Odd waited at their usual table in the cafeteria for Yumi to join them for breakfast.

When she did finally enter the cafeteria, Odd waved for her to sit with them.

Once Yumi took her seat next across from Ulrich, Jeremy immediately began explaining his thoughts on the happenings on Lyoko.

"I think that this Josh Shonnep is working for the CIA and trying to destroy Lyoko one piece at a time" Jeremy stated.

"Why would he want to do that?" Odd asked, rather confused.

"Because, Odd, no one besides us has ever encountered a virtual world such as Lyoko before. This Josh Shonnep may just assume that the effects that XANA has had on our world are just the effects of another world-wide virus. So, naturally, he would try to delete it."

"But it doesn't make sense" Yumi spoke up. "Every time we've defeated XANA, the chaos he has cause in the past has been erased from everyone's memory except ours. So how come this Josh Shonnep guy can remember?"

Jeremy thought about this for a while.

Then he said "That's an excellent point, Yumi. Unfortunately I don't have the answer to it, but I can tell you what we're going to do in the meantime."

Everyone leaned in closely.

"We're going to gather as much information on Josh J. Shonnep as we can, and tomorrow, we're going to pay a visit to him in person."

## 6 - Three o' clock

So all that day, the four friends remained indoors, digging up whatever they could find on Josh J. Shonnep.

Unfortunately for them, nothing turned up. Even Jeremy couldn't find out anything about this guy. They tried looking him up in the phone books, and they found one Josh Shonnep along with his address and number.

Jeremy immediately dialed the number on his cell phone as the four sat together in the school library.

The phone rang for what seemed like a minute. Then, a voice came answered saying that the number had been disconnected.

"I don't believe it" Jeremy shouted angrily, to which the librarian warned him to keep it down.

"He probably changed his identity or something. Everyone in the CIA does it" Odd whispered.

"Yeah, you're probably right Odd" Jeremy replied. "Well, there's not much else we can do now. We'll all meet by the front gate tomorrow afternoon before we go to his house. Agreed?"

Everyone nodded.

"Good. I'm going to head over to the factory and check on Eileda. Yumi, I'd like you to come with me."

Yumi agreed to go. The both of them stood up and left the library together.

After they had gone, Ulrich told Odd that he was going back to his room to study.

"You should come too" Ulrich advised. "We could quiz each other."

Odd shook his head. "No thanks."

Ulrich shrugged, got up and walked out the door.

Odd sat alone in the library, thinking about what he would do for the rest of the day.

That was when one of the younger students walked up to him and said,

"Did you hear the news?"

Odd looked up and shook his head.

“There's a new girl at school, and she's coming today to meet with the principal!”

Odd thought about this. Maybe he would go and meet her later on.

“What time?” Odd asked.

“She'll be here at around three o' clock.”

Odd gave a slight smile. “*Three o' clock it is, then.*”

## 7 - Conflict

Max sat silently in the back of her father's BMW as they made their way to Kadic Boarding School.

Next to her was a backpack jam-packed with school supplies, and a sleeping bag with all her clothes and laptop inside.

Neither she nor her father had spoken a word since they left the house two hours ago.

Finally, Max said "Daddy, do I really have to stay at this school for a year?"

"Max, we've been through this several times. You know we can't take you with us to Italy. This is my last meeting and it's very important."

Max looked out the window, anger building up inside of her.

"It's only for a year, honey. Then we'll all move back to America and - "

"And, what? Be a normal family again?" Max interrupted.

"That's right" her father replied.

"Don't make me laugh, dad. You and I both know that you don't really want to quit your job."

"Max, that's not . . ."

"Don't lie! It's true! You love all this constant traveling and the assignments because it gets you over a million dollars a year!"

"Max!"

"And the worst part is, that every time we move and I have to get used to another neighborhood and another school where no one likes you, you and mom don't even bother to care!"

"THAT'S ENOUGH!" her father bellowed furiously.

Max stopped and looked at her father, who was now bright red in the face.

"Your mother and I love you very much and have given you every thing you've ever wanted. So don't you ever say that we don't care!"

At this, Max looked down in silence.

“Just this once, Max, do something for us and try to fit in at this school.”

But little did her father notice the tears falling from her face and onto the leather seat.

For the rest of the ride, no one spoke another word.

## 8 - The New Girl

Ulrich sat in his room on his unkempt bed, studying. Ten or twenty books, as well as Odds dirty clothes, were scattered across the floor and the entire room smelled of old pizza and dirty laundry.

This was what Ulrich and Odd considered everyday life in a dorm room, and nothing would keep him from studying today. Not even Jeremy.

But as he turned the page of his science text book, he heard a car pull into the school parking lot. Ulrich found this odd because it was a Saturday, and no one except the principal comes in on weekends.

Ulrich hopped off his bed and peered out the window.

Outside, he could see a black BMW parked near the building where the principal's office was.

He could see a man in his forties stepping out of the driver's seat, and a beautiful blonde girl stepped out of the backseat on the passenger side.

Ulrich watched the man and the girl, who Ulrich assumed was his daughter, walk into the principal's building together.

Was she a new girl? Was she here to see the principal?

Even as these questions buzzed around Ulrich's mind, he reminded himself of his studies, returned to his bed, and continued reviewing his science.

Max and her father climbed the flights of stairs up to the principal's office, where they would confirm her last minute transfer to Kadic and set her up with a dorm room.

Once they reached the third floor, Max's father stopped her and looked at her.

“Let me do all the talking, okay?” It wasn't a request, it was a command.

Max nodded her head without saying a word, and together they entered the room that read in big, black letters, **P R I N C I P A L**.

“Ah! Mr. Johnson, it's so wonderful to finally meet you and your daughter” the principal immediately got up from his chair and walked over to greet them.

“Thank you, likewise” Mr. Johnson replied as they shook hands.

“And this must be Max” the principal said as he turned his attention to the young teenager standing beside her father. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“Hello” the girl replied in a soft, timid voice.

“Well then, both of you please sit down, and we shall get down to business.”

## 9 - Odd

At around three-twenty, Odd headed over to the principal's office, where he would hopefully see the new girl.

He climbed the stairs up to the third floor, and waited outside the principal's office.

He stood there in the hallway for what seemed like an hour, until the office door swung open, and the principal, a man, and a girl his age stepped out into the hallway.

"Thank you for coming Mr. Johnson. I'm sure your daughter will love it here at Kadic" he heard the principal say to the man.

Odd didn't wish to be seen by the principal, so he made a quick dash around the corner. But as he was running, he tripped, fell face-forward onto the floor, and caused the bulletin board to fall off the wall in the process.

The principal turned to see what had caused such a racket, and saw Odd lying on the floor, and the giant bulletin board that had fallen off the wall.

"Odd! What are you doing here?!" the principal said scornfully.

"I, um . ." Odd was too busy trying to crawl out from under the bulletin board.

"Well, since you're here, why don't you show our new miss Johnson to dorm room 102."

Odd looked up at the blonde girl standing next to the man.

She wore a blue denim jacket, along with matching jeans, and a white T-shirt underneath. She stood holding an over-stuffed backpack in one hand, and a heavy duffel-bag in the other.

"Odd! Did you hear me?" the principal shouted.

"Yes, sir" Odd replied in a shaken voice.

Odd walked up to the girl and held out his hand.

"Hi. I'm Odd."

The girl didn't move a muscle, but just stood there looking at him.

Odd pulled his hand back in embarrassment.

“Um, room 102 is just across the parking lot. I'll show you” he said as his face began to flush.

Odd started down the stairs and the girl followed after him.

As Odd and the new girl made their way across the parking lot, Odd couldn't help but look at her.

She was beautiful. Her long, silky blonde hair gleamed in the afternoon sun, and her face looked like an angel's.

“I'm Max, by the way” she finally spoke.

“You're the new girl?” Odd said to her.

“Yeah, that's me.”

“Why?” Odd asked.

She looked at him. “What?”

“Why did you decide to come here, I mean.”

“It wasn't my decision to make. My parents . . .” she began.

“I get it” Odd interrupted. “Your parents run your life.”

“Yeah, basically” she replied.

This was too cool. Here Odd was thinking this was going to be another boring day, and suddenly he's talking to the newest, and prettiest girl at Kadic.

They entered the dorm and climbed up the stairs to Odd's floor, where room 102 was, coincidentally.

As they stopped in front of Max's new room, she pulled out a key from her pocket, inserted it into the brass doorknob, and opened the door.

“Thanks for showing me my room” she said to him.

“No problem.”

They stood there and looked at each other for the longest moment.

“Well, bye Odd” she said, and almost went inside before Odd said,

“Hey Max!”

“Yeah?” she turned back to face him.

“In the morning, do you want to, um . . maybe . . have breakfast with me?”

Then, she gave the most beautiful smile he'd ever seen.

“Yeah, I'd really like that Odd.”

Odd smiled back at her. “Okay, I'll be here tomorrow morning to show you to the cafeteria” he said.

And with that, they said goodbye and Max shut the door.

Odd could barely contain his excitement as he strolled down the hallway back to his room.

## 10 - That Little Thing Called Love

It was a quarter to four by the time Odd strolled into his room to find Ulrich, still studying.

“Where have you been?” he asked curiously.

“Heaven” Odd replied absent-mindedly.

“Sounds like fun. Seriously Odd, you could've been studying. But instead you choose to goof off and—Are you even listening to me Odd?!”

But Odd was far too busy thinking of other things to even begin to care about what Ulrich had to say as he laid down on his bed and stared up at the ceiling.

Ulrich gave an agitated growl as he tossed his textbook aside and rolled over in his bed.

“You're unbelievable Odd.”

But Odd didn't hear a word he said for once again he had fallen asleep way before Ulrich.

Ulrich awoke to the sound of running water coming from the bathroom.

He sat up in his bed, groggy and even more agitated, and went to see what Odd was up to.

He was just about to pound on the door, when he heard a voice, singing.

It was Odd. He was not only taking a shower, which Ulrich thought was completely unusual because of Odd's sloppiness, but he was *singing*.

“What in the world?” Ulrich said to himself.

Well, he knew now that it was pointless to try and go back to sleep with Odd's singing echoing throughout the room, so he grabbed his key, left the room, and headed down to Jeremy's room.

Odd stepped out of the bathroom with a towel around his waist, and looked around the room. Surprisingly, Ulrich was already gone.

“Hmm, maybe he went down to breakfast already!” Odd said to himself.

Odd hummed a happy little tune as he dressed, brushed his teeth, and combed his hair.

Finally, Odd grabbed his key from under his pillow, and headed out the door to meet Max outside her room, which was just down the hall.

Max waited patiently in her room for Odd to come and knock on her door.

She was glad that she had gotten all the unpacking done the other day, so that now she could spend all the time she wanted with Odd.

Just then, the knock came, and she practically leaped off her bed to go open the door.

She opened the door, and there he was standing there, smiling.

“Hi, Odd” she greeted him.

“You ready?” he asked.

Yeah! Let's go. I'm starving.” And together, the both of them headed downstairs.

## 11 - Moving On

As Odd and Max walked together across the grounds to the cafeteria, people began to stare and whisper about how Odd was walking with the new girl at Kadic.

"I hope I'm not making you uncomfortable" Max said to him.

"What do you mean?"

"All these people are staring at us" she replied.

"It's okay" Odd assured her. "Let them stare!"

She giggled at this. "You're the best Odd!"

Ulrich, Jeremy, and Yumi sat at their usual table in the cafeteria, waiting for Odd to arrive so they could go over the day's agenda.

They couldn't have been more shocked when they saw Odd walk in with an unfamiliar girl, the same one that Ulrich had seen stepping out of the BMW the other day, holding her hand as they talked.

"Who is that?" Yumi asked, still in utter shock.

"I don't know" Jeremy replied.

"I know who she is" Ulrich announced.

Both Yumi and Jeremy looked intently at him.

"Her name is Max. She just transferred to Kadic yesterday."

They all looked back at the new girl, now being led straight to their table by Odd.

They tried to act casual as Odd introduced Max to the group.

"Hey guys! This is Max! She just transferred to Kadic yesterday, and I thought it would be cool if she sat with us today!" Odd was acting perkier than his usual self.

"Um, Odd, I don't think it's a good idea" Jeremy stated.

"Why not?" Odd was confused.

"Because, Odd, we have important things to talk about. Places to go, you know." Jeremy tried to be as

subtle about their agenda as possible.

Odd looked back at Max, who had a hurt look on her face as if someone had just insulted her.

"It's okay, Odd. You sit with your friends" she encouraged him, trying to hide this hurting in her heart.

Odd turned back to Jeremy.

"No. I promised that I would have breakfast with you" he said. "I'm sorry, guys, but it looks like you'll have to enjoy breakfast without me."

And Max and he walked away together to find another table.

"Wait! Odd!" Jeremy called after him.

But it was no use. It seemed nothing could change Odd's mind.

They would just have to go to Josh Shonnep's house without him.

Back at the Johnsons' house on Rue Hemingway, 78180, Joseph and Mary had just finished packing for their trip to Italy. All the computers had been swiped, and all their research had been saved onto separate disks. The only thing to now was to wait for the movers to arrive.

"Do you think Max will be alright?" Mary asked her husband, standing on the front porch next to her.

"Of course" he said reassuringly.

"But what will we do if something happens?"

He looked at her, worriedly. "Like what?"

"I don't know, Joseph. With all this constant traveling, she's had it pretty rough for a girl her age."

"We've been through a lot too, you know" he commented.

"That's different, Joseph. We chose to accept this assignment when she was only eight. She's a changed girl now."

"Is that a bad thing?" he inquired.

She gave him a serious look.

"C'mon Mary, maybe this is a good thing for her."

"How is constantly moving from country to country, school to school, and house to house, a good thing

for our daughter?" there was a hint of anger and frustration in her voice.

He took her in his arms, and gently rubbed her shoulder.

"Don't worry. It'll all be over soon" he assured her.

At that very moment, the moving truck pulled up to their driveway.

"You talk to the movers. I'll start getting our things" and with that, Mary walked back into the house.

## 12 - Bus Ride

Later that day at around noon, Yumi, Jeremy and Ulrich met at the front gate, and set off towards town. They would arrive at the nearest bus station, and ride all the way across town to Josh Shonnet's house.

As the three friends walked side-by-side towards the city, they went over the plan one more time.

"I called and arranged for a bus to pick us up at the station at around one o' clock, so we'll be looking for the **TransFrance** logo on our bus" Jeremy reminded them, for probably the fifth time that since this morning.

"So, that'll be about an hour-and-a-half ride. Then, when we get off, we'll be looking for Rue, Hemingway, 78180."

"When we get there, we'll say that we're from a nearby school, conducting a survey on the safety of school bus transportation."

"For the fifth time, Jeremy, we know the plan" Ulrich said, clearly annoyed.

"I'm just being precautionary. We need to be careful with this guy. He could be working with the CIA. We don't want to get involved in something like that." Jeremy always thought of everything.

By the time they had reached the nearest bus station, it was about a quarter to one, so they had just enough time to grab a small lunch at the café right inside the station.

It was very crowded in the tiny internet café, so Yumi, Ulrich, and Jeremy had to squeeze through the sea of people up towards the front counter, where all sorts of pastries and sandwiches were arranged in a glass case, and a huge chalkboard menu with drinks and prices scribbled on it.

A woman in her fifties and dressed in a pink shirt with a white apron around her small waist stood behind the counter, with an exhausted look on her face.

"Can I help you?" she asked wearily.

"We'll have three sandwiches and three bottles of water" Jeremy replied.

"That'll be ten Euro" The woman grunted.

Jeremy reached into his right pocket, pulled out ten Euro, and placed it on the counter.

The woman gave them their sandwiches and their water, and the three walked out of the café together.

It was now five to one as Ulrich, Yumi, and Jeremy sat on a nearby bench, nibbling on their sandwiches.

“So, Jeremy, what do you think is up with Odd?” Yumi asked.

Jeremy rolled his eyes, annoyed at the thought of Odd's recent behavior.

“Who knows, but I hope he gets back down to earth soon so we can focus on fixing Lyoko.”

At that moment, the TransFrans bus drove up to and stopped at the sign to their left.

“We'd best get going” Jeremy said curtly as he stood up and walked to the bus.

Yumi and Ulrich followed silently behind him, and all three boarded the bus.

## 13 - Tag

Back at the school, Odd was enjoying a beautiful summer's day with Max as they sat next to each other under the shade of a tall oak tree outside the campus woods, and watched the clouds go by.

"That one kinda looks like my dog, Kiwi" Odd exclaimed as he pointed at a distant cloud.

"That one over there looks like my old cat, Mittens."

They smiled at each other, and Max began to laugh.

"What? What's so funny?" Odd asked puzzled.

It took Max a few seconds to catch her breath before she answered.

"Nothing, its just back home, I never really enjoyed just sitting around doing silly things like watching the clouds. But now, I feel like the happiest person alive!"

Odd stared at her in befuddlement.

"You mean to tell me that you've never just sat around for hours doing nothing but daydream or listen to music?"

Max shook her head. "No, we were always on the go because of my parents' work. I could never find the time to try and have fun like normal kids because, before I knew it, we were all set and ready to move again. Finally, I just lost all interest and became one of those uptight loners."

This made Odd a little uncomfortable. How could Max have been like that? To him, she seemed like the most beautiful, fun-loving girl he had ever met.

"But right now, I finally know what its like to have fun and enjoy a whole day doing silly things with a boyfriend."

Max realized what she had just said, and Odd immediately perked up.

"Did you just day . . ."

"No! No, I didn't say anything" Max exclaimed, practically dying of embarrassment.

"Don't worry. I didn't hear a thing" Odd said, and winked at her.

Max looked away, still aware that Odd was smiling and watching her every move from that point on, and tried to think of away to change the subject.

Quickly, she punched him, hard, in the arm.

“Ow!” he yelled.

“Um, tag! You're it!” Max said, and she sat up and ran off, back into the woods.

Odd, baffled by Max's behavior, got up and bolted after her.

He followed Max through the woods for what seemed like forever, until he finally found her in a small clearing. She was hunched over and seemed to be looking at something in the ground.

As he tried to catch his breath, he walked over toward where she stood.

“Well Max, you sure can run. I'll give you that” he said breathlessly.

“Hey Odd, come over here and look at this” Max shouted and motioned for him to hurry.

Odd walked up behind, looked down at the ground, and shuddered with a shocking terror. Odd knew immediately where they were, but more importantly, how much trouble he was in. What he saw in the ground was the entrance to the waterway that led to the factory which, up until now, had remained a secret between Jeremy, Yumi, Ulrich and him.

Max looked up at him, and saw the look of anxiety.

“What is Odd? What is that thing?” she asked curiously.

Odd grabbed her arm and pulled her away from the strange object embedded in the ground.

“Let's get out of here, Max” he said as he tried to lead her away.

“Odd, wait! What is that thing?” Max was utterly confused by Odd's behavior.

“I don't know, but we really shouldn't be out here. I mean, what if someone were to notice that we weren't at school?” there was a definite nervousness in his voice.

“Well, I guess” Max looked at him worriedly. It was as if something was wrong with him.

With that, Max took one last glance at the mysterious object in the ground, and Odd led Max by the hand through the woods back in the direction of the campus.

## 14 - Jeremy Hears a Noise

By the time Max and Odd had arrived back at the campus, it was nearly dusk as the sun slipped slowly behind the horizon in west, so that the light hit Max's face to make it light up Odd's eyes.

"I really enjoyed spending the day with you" he said to her as they stood in the middle of the soccer field.

"Me too" she replied.

He couldn't think of anything else to say. Actually, Odd wished that this day had never happened. Maybe she would just forget about the entrance to the . . .

"Odd?"

"Hm?" Odd quickly turned his focus back to her.

She shook her head. "Nothing, nevermind."

"Well, I guess I'll see you tomorrow" he said, and headed back to the dorms, leaving Max all alone in the middle of the soccer field, as the sun finally faded under the horizon, and the darkness of night began to set in.

Max remained in the same spot for half an hour, sitting and waiting patiently in the grass for the school to be shadowed in the dark of night, when it was most difficult to notice someone sneaking into the woods.

Max was determined to get one last look at the thing she had seen that day and find out exactly what it was, whether Odd liked it or not.

Ulrich, Yumi, and Jeremy's trip had taken lot longer than they expected.

They had absolutely no luck of finding anything in Josh Shonnep's house because it was completely empty, as if no one was ever even there.

One thing that was peculiarly odd, however, was that the house was impeccably spotless. Someone would've have to have cleaned the house recently for it to have been that clean; no crumbs, no dirt, not even dust. That meant that Josh Shonnep must have somehow known that they were coming, and swiped the place clean and relocated, making sure no trace of his presence was left behind.

In other words, it was clear that they were dealing with a professional.

By the time the three had returned, unseen, at the school, it was already dark and everyone was in bed.

“Well, that was a complete waste of time” Ulrich grunted as he, Yumi and Jeremy strolled silently across the school grounds toward the dorms.

Neither Jeremy nor Yumi said a word, but they knew he was right. They had accomplished nothing and were no closer to saving Eileda or Lyoko.

Suddenly, Jeremy stopped.

“What's wrong Jeremy?” Yumi asked.

“C'mon guys” Ulrich said impatiently. “We have to get back before someone notices we're not in our rooms.”

“You guys go. I'll see you in the morning” Jeremy said.

Yumi nodded. “See you, Jeremy. Try not to get caught.”

As soon as they were gone, Jeremy broke into a sprint towards the woods. He had stopped because he had heard something moving in the brush; something far too big to be a squirrel or an opossum.

No. Jeremy was sure. It was a person.

## 15 - Max's First Attempt

The night was black and cold as Max bolted through the thick of the woods. She had cut it too close that time, for Jeremy had caught her watching from the thicket and was now chasing her. She couldn't be caught, not this time. If Jeremy found her, then he would tell Odd and she would never be able to enjoy another moment with him again.

She could hear the distant sounds of Jeremy's footsteps a ways behind her, so hopefully she could outrun him and, after he gave up and left, she would head back towards the clearing in the middle of the woods.

Finally, Max stopped and hid inside a thick bushel. Apparently, she had lost Jeremy a long time ago, because she could no longer hear him. After waiting three minutes to make sure the coast was clear, Max emerged from the bush, and sprinted back in the direction of the clearing.

When Max finally reached the tiny clearing, she had difficulty locating the strange object in the ground. She began to move towards the center of the territory, and felt around the cold ground for something metallic and circular.

At last, her hand landed upon the brass disc embedded in the grass. As Max felt around the object, she could feel tiny handles near the outer edge and in the middle. Max then realized that this was an entrance to an underground waterway!

What in the world was a waterway doing in the middle of the woods on a school campus? Max was determined to find, and she clasped her hands around the handles.

Suddenly, just when she was about to pull, Max heard a voice coming from the woods. As she looked up, she could see the blinding light of a flashlight, coming nearer and the voices growing louder.

Startled and frustrated, Max cursed under her breath, bounded out of the clearing and dashed straight back towards the campus. She would have to come back another time, hopefully with better luck.

"Hello? Who's there?!" Jim bellowed as he stomped through the woods with his heavy flashlight.

"Who's there? Show yourself!"

Just like before, no one answered.

"Hmph. I could've sworn I heard something" Jim grumbled to himself. Convinced that Jeremy had been

mistaken when he informed about someone sneaking around in the woods, Jim headed back towards the campus.

## 16 - The Secret Waterway

The next morning, Jeremy waited in the hallway for Ulrich and Odd to emerge from their room so they could find meet Yumi and head down to the factory as quick as possible.

Finally, at about nine o' clock, Ulrich and Odd stepped out of their rooms; Odd looking unusually happy, and Ulrich looking more sulky than usual.

"Have a bad night guys?" Jeremy asked sarcastically.

"Not at all!" Odd exclaimed. "I haven't had that good of sleep in a long time!"

Jeremy turned to Ulrich. "What about you, Ulrich? You seem a little tired."

"I couldn't sleep" he groaned. "Knowing that we couldn't find anything to help Eileda . . ."

"Oh yeah! How did that go yesterday?" Odd asked.

"If you had actually came with us, Odd, maybe we might've . . ." Jeremy started to say before Ulrich waved his hand, signifying that it was no use.

"Even if he had come along, Jeremy, it wouldn't have made a bit of difference. That place was completely empty."

"Yeah, I guess you're right, but still Odd. You chose to spend the day with some girl instead of helping Eileda?" Jeremy said accusingly.

"Speaking of which, I have to go meet Max downstairs right now!" Odd said as he started for the stairwell.

But Jeremy grabbed him by the arm before he could take another step.

"Hey! Let go!"

"No, Odd. You're going to the factory with us today. Since you chose not to help us yesterday, you can be the one to tell Eileda that we didn't find anything to help her."

"Aw c'mon Jeremy!" Odd protested.

"No buts, Odd. Let's go" Ulrich said.

Without another word, the three headed downstairs where Yumi would be waiting for them.

“Alright, let's see” the nurse said as she removed the metal thermometer from Max's mouth.

“Oh dear, one hundred and four” the nurse proclaimed.

Max sniffled and coughed as she lay in her bed.

“Alright Max. Stay in bed and try to rest. Here, drink plenty of fluids” the nurse advised, and placed two bottles of orange juice on the bed stand next to the window along with an orange capsule of pills.

“Take two after I leave, two during lunch, and one before bed. That will bring down the fever and take care of those sinuses.”

Max looked up at the nurse, weary.

“Thank you” she whispered through her soar throat.

The nurse wished her a get-well-soon, and left the room, leaving Max alone in the comfort of her dorm room.

As she lay exhausted in her bed, Max thought over how she would sneak out and return to the clearing, as she had done just last night.

The funny thing was that, this time, she didn't have to pretend she was sick. Being out running in the freezing cold all night had taken a toll on her. Her throat cracked every time she spoke, her head ached with an unbearable throbbing pain, and she could hardly breathe through her stuffed-up nose.

But she had to find a way to get out of here and sneak into the woods. She had to find out what it was about that waterway that Odd had been so secretive about.

“Eileda? It's Jeremy.”

“Oh Jeremy! I'm so glad you're here. Things have gotten worse! I can't control it. I don't know what's going on!” Eileda quivered with anxiety as she spoke.

“Don't worry. Odd, Ulrich and Yumi are on their way” Jeremy replied.

Eileda waited in the lonely mountain region for her three friends to arrive.

The second they materialized in front of her, she ran towards them.

Odd, Ulrich, and Yumi looked up, and stared in horror at what they saw.

The mountains had been twisted up like twizlers and now stretched evry which way across the region. Not only that, but the once flat level plateau was now like a winding road that twisted and turned like no tomorrow.

How long before the entire region would be distorted to the point of automatic destruction?

“I've waited so long to here some good news. Tell me, what did you find at Josh J. Shonnep's house?” Eileda's eyes were filled with desperation and hope.

“Well, Eileda” Odd began. “we couldn't find anything. The house was totally empty, like no one was ever there.”

Eileda suddenly looked like she was about to cry, and so she turned away.

“Hey! Don't worry Eileda! We'll find a way to fix all this” Odd said cheerfully.

“After all” Yumi said “we've never let you down before.”

“And we're not about to start now” Ulrich added.

Eileda turned around and nodded, trying her best not to frown.

## 18 - SOLD!

Max had successfully climbed out her window and scaled the water pipe along the outside wall of the dorms without anyone noticing, and now she was, once again, on her way back to the woods where the mysterious waterway entrance was waiting for her.

She reached the clearing at no time at all. The forest was already becoming more familiar to her.

Just like before, she grasped the handles on both sides of the disc, and pulled with a mighty heave. She set the disc down on the ground and looked down into the hole.

There was a long ladder that led down into the waterway, but she could not tell how far it went. It was a good thing Max came better prepared this time, as she slipped her backpack off her shoulder, and opened it up to make sure she had brought her flashlight.

Not intimidated by the foreboding darkness, Max immediately began scaling down the ladder, down to the depths of the underground sewers.

Half way down the ladder, the nauseating smell of sewage had caused to climb the rest of the way with only one hand, as she used the other to hold her nose.

Once she reached the bottom, Max took out her flashlight and flipped the switch.

All at once, dozens of rats appeared, and fled from the blinding light.

As she shined the light in front of her, Max could see a little pathway that ran along side of the stream of reeking sewer water.

Max, once again, put her hand to her in resistance to the horrid stench and made her way down the long, dark walkway.

“Well, Jeremy? What should we do?” asked Yumi.

“Check all the regions. If you find anything strange, let me know. I'm going to try and check up on Josh Shonnep and see if I can find out where he is” Jeremy replied.

“Okay, then” Yumi proclaimed. “Lets get moving.”

Jeremy set his ear piece on the keyboard and pulled out his laptop. If Josh Shonnep had indeed flown the coop like he suspected, Jeremy would know. He pulled up a website that had all the "For Sale" listings from here to Rue Hemingway. He scrolled down the extensive list, and finally came upon the picture a very familiar house. The same house that they had visited just yesterday on Rue Hemingway, 78180 was posted on the screen. But the words that were printed under the picture was what caused Jeremy's mind to burst into a pulsing frenzy.

**"SOLD! Luxurious two story abode. Former owners: Joseph, Mary, and Maxine Johnson."**

Finally, after wandering through the dark, smelly waterway for at least fifteen minutes, Max spotted a gleam of light at what seemed to be the end of the tunnel. She hurried over towards the bright light, and found another ladder leading up to the surface.

She climbed the ladder as fast as she could; wanting more than anything to escape the horrid smell of the sewers. When she climbed out of the exit, she breathed in the fresh air with joyous relief.

Max looked around. She did not recognize this part of the woods at all. In fact, she was nowhere near the school grounds anymore. How far had she gone? Where was she now?

Just then, Max noticed a giant building in the distance, and not just any big building. It was some kind of abandoned factory!

Max had no idea what time it was, but she wasn't about to turn back now. She hiked up her backpack and began her way towards the mysterious factory.

Ulrich, Eileda, Yumi and Odd had searched the entire mountain region, but had not found a single sign of XANA, his monsters, or any activated towers.

"Jeremy?" Eileda called.

"Did you guys find anything?" Jeremy asked anxiously.

"No. Everything's pretty much normal here." Yumi replied.

"Well, I found something on Josh Shonnep that I think you'll find very interesting."

"What? What is it Jeremy?" Eileda exclaimed.

"You the house we visited yesterday?" Jeremy stated.

"Yeah, that was his house" Ulrich said.

“Right, it was sold the same day we checked it out.” Jeremy waited eagerly for a response.

“No wonder the place was completely empty!” Yumi shouted.

“Yeah, but that's not even the weird part” Jeremy continued. “That house didn't belong to Josh Shonnep. The former owners were three people by the name of Joseph, Mary, and Maxine Johnson.”

“What?!” Odd exclaimed. “That can't be right!”

“Why?” Jeremy asked, perplexed.

“Because Maxine Johnson is the new girl here at Kadic!”

## 19 - Secret Revealed

The factory turned out to be even more massive up close, as Max crossed the giant bridge across the river to the factory's entrance.

Why would Odd be hiding this from her? It was just a decrepit old factory. From what Max could see, there was nothing special about it at all.

Once inside, Max looked around and saw nothing but worn-out machinery and spare parts lying around. One thing did catch Max's particular interest, however. There was a giant elevator that seemed to be the only working thing in the entire plant.

Max decided that whatever she did now wouldn't hurt anything, as there was no one around. So, Max climbed into the elevator, pressed the down button, and descended down into the factory sublevels.

"What are you saying Odd?" Jeremy said, even more perplexed than he had been less than ten seconds ago.

"That girl that I introduced you at breakfast the day you guys went to that guy's house, her name *is* Maxine Johnson!" Odd was going hysterical now.

"Okay, calm down. Maybe it's just a coincidence." Yumi said in a practical tone.

"Don't even try to convince me that there are two Maxine Johnson's in the same area!" Odd shouted.

No one spoke another word.

"Wait a minute! I met her father the day she arrived! He was with her talking to the principal!" Odd exclaimed.

"Are you serious? The guy that's behind all this was right here at Kaidc?!" Jeremy roared as he shot up from his seat.

"I'm dead serious! I can't believe I came that close to him" Odd was now feeling a little scared.

"Now that you mention it, I saw them drive into the parking lot from my window." Ulrich proclaimed.

"Okay, I want you guys back here immediately. We're going to talk to the principal about . ." Jeremy stopped in mid-sentence.

"What's wrong Jeremy?" Yumi asked.

“Someone's coming. I can hear the elevator moving.”

“Quick Jeremy! Devirtualize us now!” Yumi commanded.

Jeremy did as Yumi said, but just as he typed the last keys, the elevator door opened and there, standing inside of it, was Maxine Johnson.

## 20 - Welcome to the Group

“Oh . . . my . . . god” these were the only words that managed to escape Max's mouth as she stared across the room to the massive, eye-popping super computer and

noticed a blonde boy with glasses standing beside it.

“What are you doing down here?!” the boy roared. “Get out! Get out now!”

He was going crazy, with fierceness in his eyes and coming nearer and nearer swinging his arms threateningly at her. But before he could reach her, the elevator doors unexpectedly swung themselves shut, and the elevator continued its descent to a lower floor. Max fell backwards against the wall, scared, confused, and her head spinning out of control.

“We have to get up there!” Ulrich shouted as he exited the scanner and bounded towards the elevator. “C'mon you guys! Jeremy might be in trouble!”

Ulrich slammed on the up button for the elevator as Yumi and Odd stood anxiously behind him.

When the doors opened neither Odd Ulrich nor Yumi could not take another step or even move. They just stared at what they saw, sitting inside the giant elevator looking rattled and frightened; Maxine Johnson.

All four students were now in the super computer room, where Yumi, Ulrich and Jeremy were in deep conversation, while Odd sat next to Max, who was still as shaken as they had found her in the elevator.

“What I want to know is how she even got here!” Jeremy hissed.

“That's the thing. We have no idea” Yumi whispered in reply.

“I'll bet you Odd knows” Ulrich mumbled.

They all looked over at Odd, sitting next to Max talking slowly to her.

“Odd” Jeremy called out “come over here.”

Odd reluctantly stood up and walked over towards the group.

“Do you know how Max could've found the factory?” Jeremy asked suspiciously.

“Well, um . . .” Odd knew there was no way out of this one.

“Odd!” Ulrich growled. “How did she find out?”

“It wasn't my fault! We were in the woods one day playing tag, and she accidentally found the entrance to the sewer.”

“What were you doing playing tag in the woods in the first place?” Yumi asked angrily.

“We were . . . on a date” Odd grumbled.

Jeremy looked over towards Max, still sitting against the wall. “Honestly Odd, you've done some pretty stupid things, but this one takes the cake.” Jeremy was in no mood for forgiveness.

Odd said nothing.

“Well, we have no choice. We'll have to do a jump-back-in-time immediately” Jeremy declared.

Odd stared at him. “No! Jeremy, please don't!”

“We don't have a choice Odd. No one can ever know about this place except for us” Yumi said.

Odd was silent again, for a moment. “I think we can trust her. I know her! Max would never betray us!”

Of course, everyone else was not quite convinced of this.

“All right Odd.” Jeremy sighed. “We'll ask her, but If I detect any trace of deceit in her voice then it's the jump-back-in-time.”

The four turned and walked over to Max. She looked up at them with fear and bewilderment. Jeremy stepped forward and pulled her up.

“Max, I know this is a lot to take in and that you're scared” so far so good.

“We can explain everything on one condition” Jeremy said.

“Can you keep all of this a secret?” the moment of truth.

Max gazed around the room in awe, looked back at the group and answered

“I promise. I will not tell anyone what I've seen.” She spoke with clarity and complete truthfulness.

Jeremy stepped back. “Maxine Johnson, right?” She nodded timidly.

“Welcome to the group.”



## 21 - A New Friend

It was now 1:30 pm and Joseph and Mary Johnson were now enjoying a first-class dinner on an **American Airlines** plane headed straight for Washington DC.

"I can't wait to be back home" Mary said excitedly as Joseph took another sip of his wine.

"It'll only be a few more hours" he took her hand in his and rubbed it gently.

"I wonder if that Kadic Academy allows phone calls" she said as she reached into her black-leather purse and pulled out her cell phone.

"Can it wait a few more hours?" he asked.

"Don't you want to know how she is?"

"Of course I do, but according to my watch her classes don't end for another hour."

"Oh, then of course. It'll have to wait" she said as she put her phone back into her purse.

"I'm sure she's fine, honey" he assured her, and pulled her close to him.

Only four more hours until they would be back in America, and another month before Max would be able to join them.

"So, how does it work?" Max asked.

"Here, I can show you" Jeremy replied.

The four huddled around Jeremy as he sat down in his seat and began typing.

"It's merely a process of virtualizing you by converting your molecular structure into a form of megabytes and downloading you into a virtual environment." Odd, Ulrich and Yumi had been doing this for months and they still couldn't understand a word Jeremy was saying.

"So basically, it's like being in a computer game" Max declared. "That's cool!"

"Now Max, I want to introduce you to Eileda."

Suddenly, a face appeared onscreen and began to talk.

“Jeremy! Is everything all right?” she asked frantically. “Jeremy! There's someone behind you!”

“It's all right Eileda. She's one of us now.” Max was staring at Eileda.

“She talks?” Max exclaimed.

Jeremy introduced them both. “Eileda, this is Maxine Johnson. Max, this is Eileda.”

“Nice to meet you Max” Eileda declared.

Max remained silent as she stared wonderingly at Eileda.

Jeremy glanced down at his watch. “Oh my gosh! We have to get back to school!”

“Jeremy, will I see you tonight?” Eileda asked.

“Not likely. I'll be working on a little something for Max” he looked back at Max and gave her a wink.

“We'll stop by tomorrow Eileda, okay?”

“Farewell Jeremy” Eileda said before she disappeared from the screen.

Jeremy hopped off the seat and headed towards the elevator.

“C'mon guys. Let's head back to campus.” All four of them entered the elevator together.

## 22 - Manipulation

“What are we going to do at the factory tomorrow, Jeremy?” Max asked curiously, as the five of them walked through the woods, now gleaming in the late afternoon sun.

“Well, we have a bit of a problem right now on Lyoko” Jeremy said.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Max was all questions now.

“Oh, I imagine you could be quite a bit of help” he replied.

The four continued their way through the woods towards campus.

“Oh no!” Max cried.

“What?! What is it?” Odd exclaimed.

“I forgot about the nurse!”

Everyone was suddenly utterly confused. “The nurse?” Jeremy said.

“Yes! I was kind of sick today, and she said that she was going to come back and check up on me later.”

Odd's eyes widened. “So that's why you weren't in class today!”

“Oh man! The nurse probably knows that I'm gone! I have to hurry!” Max declared as she began sprinting ahead of the group.

“See you tomorrow guys!” she hollered and disappeared into the thick of the woods.

Once she was gone, Odd spoke up. “What did I tell you guys! We can trust her, right?”

“Odd, have you forgotten already whose daughter she is?”

“Oh come off it Jeremy! Do you honestly think that she is involved with that Josh Shonnep guy?” Odd retorted.

“Yes, I do.” Jeremy answered. “When I saw her father's name, I noticed that his name is an exact anagram of Josh J Shonnep.”

The other here stopped and stared at him. “No way!” They shouted in unison.

“Joseph Johnson, Josh Jo Shonnep. You guys do the math.”

Unfortunately, Jeremy was right. They were exact anagrams.

“Oh, I get!” Yumi exclaimed. “You let her into the group in order to get closer to her father!”

Jeremy nodded. “Precisely.”

“That's a pretty dirty trick, even for you Jeremy” Odd grumbled.

“Odd! Get a hold of yourself! What's more important, your back-stabbing girlfriend or saving Eileda?”  
Jeremy yelled.

“She's not a back-stabber! I refuse to believe it!” Odd shouted furiously, and ran off.

“Odd! Wait!” Ulrich called after him, but Yumi held him back.

“Let him go” she said calmly. “He needs to think things over.”

Jeremy resumed walking towards the campus. “C'mon you guys, its almost sunset. We need to get going.”

Yumi and Ulrich obeyed and followed slowly behind Jeremy.

## 23 - First Encounter with a Vampire

The next morning, all of them sat at their usual table nibbling at their breakfast.

The only one that was missing was Jeremy.

“Where do you think he could be?” Yumi asked just as Odd scarfed down an entire blueberry muffin.

“He's probably just typing in his little log book with his face plastered to the screen” Ulrich joked.

Just as Ulrich had said this, Jeremy came walking up behind them, clinging to his beloved laptop, as usual. “Good morning everybody.”

After everyone had mumbled a sleepy greeting, Jeremy sat down and spoke again.

“I have to something for you Max, and I was hoping to test it out at the factory after class. If you don't mind, that is.”

Max looked up from her plate, eyes sparked with curiosity. “Great, I'd love to.”

“Then we'll all leave after second hour class” Jeremy declared as he sat down.

“By the way Max, what classes do you have?”

“Well, first I have biology with Mrs. Hertz . . .”

Odd almost jumped out of his seat. “That's Ulrich's and my first class!”

“Then I have world history with Mr. Pole, and after that . . .”

Max continued on with her list of classes as Jeremy pulled out his laptop. Today was definitely going to be interesting.

The first two hours seem to fly by, and by 10:15 Max was already on her way to the factory, when suddenly a tall, black-haired girl in a pink blouse, skirt and pants stopped her.

“You're that new girl, Max right?” the girl asked in a rather rude and invasive tone.

Max had been taught long enough to know how to mask her feelings. She glared coldly at the girl, showing no sign of intimidation. “Yeah, who's asking?”

“Sissy Delmas, prettiest girl on campus and daughter of the school's principal, that's who” the girl snapped. “I understand that you're hanging out with Ulrich and his gang now, correct?”

Max said nothing, but nodded, still keeping her icy cold façade.

“Just a little advice; You keep away from Ulrich. He's mine!”

Max couldn't understand why this girl would assume that she was interested in Ulrich, but she decided to play along. “Or what” Max said challengingly, raising her eyebrow for effect.

“Or else you're going to see a side of me, that's not at all pretty” Sissy hissed, and strutted away with her nose in the air.

“Too late for that” Max whispered to herself, and sneaked off into the forest. That little chat with Sissy had cost her too much time. She had to hurry now or she would be late.

## 24 - The Lyoko Ninja

Yumi, Ulrich and Odd stood around, waiting for Max to arrive. The only sounds in the room being the clicking and tapping of the keyboard as Jeremy entered the arrival coordinates and began contacting Eileda.

At last, the door to the elevator opened and Max stepped into the room.

“Where have you been?” Jeremy asked inquiringly, not taking his eyes off the screen.

“Sorry, I was held up” she apologized.

“It's all right” Odd assured her. “Now we're all here, so let's get to the scanners.”

Max looked over at Jeremy, who hadn't seemed to look at her since she arrived.

“Am I going too?” she asked anxiously.

“Yes” he answered. “Hurry up now. We don't want to keep Eileda waiting.”

So the four of them stepped into the rusty elevator and began their descent to the scanner room.

“Okay guys, virtualization in thirty seconds” Jeremy's voice came from the loudspeaker, as Yumi, Ulrich, and Odd each stepped into the scanners.

Max's heart began to race as she watched the scanners close.

Jeremy pulled up all three of their files, and began initiating the virtualization process.

“Scanner-Odd, scanner-Yumi, scanner-Ulrich” Jeremy said.

“Virtualization!”

About thirty seconds later, the empty scanners opened and Jeremy's voice came on again.

“Okay Max, get in one of the three scanners” he commanded.

Max obeyed and slowly, cautiously entered the middle scanner. Her heart was now racing at the speed of light as the doors closed behind her, trapping her in the small brass tube.

“So, this is what claustrophobia feels like.” Max thought to herself.

Suddenly, the machine began to hum, and she felt this tingling sensation all over her body. It almost felt like she was losing herself, molecule by molecule.

“Virtualization!”

The next few seconds were like traveling through a black hole. Although her physical being was no longer intact, Max was now flying at the speed of light as a group of particles that would hopefully be put back together at the end of this tunnel.

A second later Max felt herself being virtually reassembled and suddenly found herself in some kind of jungle, where the trees were bent out of shape and everything almost seemed to be dying.

“Hey Max!” A familiar voice called from behind her. She turned around to see Odd, Ulrich, Yumi and a girl with short, striking pink hair walking towards her.

“Whoa, what are you supposed to be?” Yumi scoffed.

Just then, Jeremy's voice came on. “Ahem, Max is a Lyoko ninja, thank you very much!”

Max took a moment to look herself over. She was indeed wearing rogue ninja clothes. She couldn't help but notice the weapons that the others carried; a sword, a fan, and laser arrows.

“Jeremy, do I have a weapon?” Max called out.

“Oh yes. In fact, reach into the pouch on your right” Jeremy replied.

Max did as he said, and pulled out a rather large kunai knife. There were also a few throwing-stars inside the pouch as well.

“Wow” Odd gasped. “Jeremy, is this what you were working on?”

“Yes, but we don't have time to chat right now. Your mission today is to explore the jungle region and find clues as to what's attacking Lyoko.”

All of them nodded, and immediately went on their way down the jungle path.

## 25 - Star Gazing

After a long day of scouting, Yumi, Ulrich, Odd, and Max were exhausted. By the time they returned from Lyoko, it was nearly past sunset. All five of them headed back for their dorms, tired and limp.

“So Max” Jeremy began “how was your first time on Lyoko?”

“Oh it was incredible! I've never imagined anything like it! It- it was like being in a videogame!”

The others giggled amusedly at her excitement. They were nearly to the dorms now as they emerged from the foliage of the dark forest and strolled across the parking lot.

“I have to get home” Yumi proclaimed. “My parents are probably worried sick by now.” The all waved

“Well, good night guys” Jeremy said he and Ulrich waved goodbye to Odd, Max and headed inside.

Odd and Max stood silently side-by-side, for the longest time. Gazing at each other under the full moon light, it was like seeing a whole different person beside them.

Suddenly Odd spoke up. “I'll-uh, walk you to your room, if you want” he stuttered.

“Sure. Thanks” she answered. Suddenly, however, Max didn't feel like going to her room; not yet.

“Hey, I thought we were going to your room” Odd groaned as Max led him up the stairs of the dorms, until they reached the emergency exit that led out onto the ceiling. Max opened the door and pulled him along, giggling through the whole time.

“What's the big deal, huh? What're we doing up here?” Odd asked, utterly befuddled.

“Didn't you ever just want to stay up and look at the stars when you were little?” she asked.

Odd still wasn't seeing where this was going. “I-uh, guess so” he uttered.

Max then sat down and leaned back, gazing up at the millions of stars that shone high overhead in the clear, nighttime sky.

Odd, not knowing exactly what to do, sat down next to her and tried to play it cool. “*Don't screw this up*” he thought to himself.

“So, you like being on the team and everything?” he asked.

Max turned to him, a slight look of confusion on her face. "Team?"

"Well, you know; the whole saving Lyoko thing."

"Oh! Yeah, it's awesome!" she said, happily. "In fact, I wanted to thank you."

Odd turned to her, even more confused than he had been just a few seconds before. "For what?"

She looked away, for a brief moment. "For being my friend."

How could he do this to her? Here he was, apart of Jeremy's ridiculous plan to manipulate Max, and here she was thanking him for being "her friend."

Odd didn't answer, but just smiled warmly at her, trying his best to hide his guilt. They both became silent for a while as they gazed at the stars.

"You know Jeremy thinks this whole Lyoko crisis we've got going right now is all Josh Shonnep's doing, but I still think its XANA" Odd finally spoke.

Max suddenly stood up, and smiled down at him. "Well, whoever it is, they're no match for us."

Odd grinned and nodded back. "That's right."

Odd then stood up next to Max. He suddenly realized how dangerously close they were.

"It's late" Max said. "We should get some sleep."

Odd nodded, and followed Max inside and together they headed back down the stairs to their dorms.

## 26 - Misunderstanding

By the time Odd walked in, it was half past ten, and Ulrich was laying lazily on his bed, waiting for him.

“Hey tiger! How did it go with Max?” Ulrich teased.

“How long do you think Jeremy plans to keep this up?” Odd said, angrily.

“What do you mean?” Ulrich asked in reply.

“This whole using-Max thing; is he seriously going to go through with it until the end?” Odd yelled in frustration.

“Whoa, calm down Odd. I'm sure Jeremy knows what's best. Remember, this is about Eileda.”

“I know, but that doesn't mean we have to hurt her!”

“Odd, you're being ridiculous..” Ulrich started before Odd shouted again.

“No! I'll tell you what's ridiculous; the fact that Jeremy would risk manipulating, hurting, and deceiving innocent people like Max for his stupid virtual girlfriend!”

Ulrich stood up and pushed Odd against the door.

“Eileda isn't just Jeremy's girlfriend. She's our friend too. Or have you forgotten already?” he snorted angrily.

Odd fell silent, too overwhelmed to admit that he almost had forgotten. “Ulrich, I'm--.. sorry. I wasn't thinking” he stammered apologetically.

“So what else is new” Ulrich scoffed. He walked away and lay back on his bed.

Odd said nothing, but hung his head in shame as he slumped onto his bed, and slowly fell into a deep, uninviting sleep. For the rest of the following day, neither Odd nor Ulrich spoke much to each other.

## 27 - Dark Confrontation

Max was sitting quietly in her dorm room, day-dreaming about Odd. He was just the most perfect guy she could've ever hoped to have met anywhere. She began to wish how she could've met him sooner; then maybe things would've gone a little better in her life. Maybe she could've been happier before, like she was right now, thinking about him.

Glancing at her clock, Max snapped out of her daze and went to her drawer for a pair of pants and a T-shirt for bed. Slowly, she slipped out of her clothes and pulled out a pair of old, cotton sweat-pants and a sports shirt from her previous boarding school.

Little did Max know, as she was changing and facing away from the window, a foreboding shadow slipped through the locks on the pane and menacingly circled overhead, looming over the unsuspecting girl. It was only when Max noticed the sudden darkness in the room that she looked up and barely managed to scream before the shadow enveloped her, swallowing her voice, her breath. It suffocated her, and there was nothing she could do. Max tried to fight it, but the shadow pinned her tiny body down to the floor. She was helpless. The only thing she could think of as she sank deeper and deeper into the darkness was Odd... and the tiny electrical outlet on the wall not more than five inches from where she lay.

## 28 - Not An Accident

The next morning at around seven, Odd and Ulrich walked out of their room and headed downstairs. It was a Tuesday, and just as Ulrich and Odd had gotten into their usual, boring school day routine, they walked out from the stairwell and into a crowd of panicked girls. Suddenly, they all started staring at Odd, who sunk his head at this uncomfortable greeting. Odd and Ulrich continued down the hall through the mess of girls, as they began whispering while they kept staring.

Suddenly, the two buys were intercepted by Jim, who stopped to talk to them.

“Stern, DelaRobia, this way. There's something you need to see.” With that, Jim turned them around and escorted them out of the building and over to the infirmary

When Ulrich and Odd walked into the sunlit room, they were shocked, almost terrified to see Max lying unconscious in one of the white, hospital beds. None, however, were more shaken then Odd.

“Max!” he cried, and he rushed over to the side of the bed and look at her.

The nurse restrained him and pulled him away from the bed. “Odd, please. There's no point in shouting. She's unconscious.”

Odd looked up at her with a ragged, nerve-wracking look on his face. “What happened to her?” he asked, worriedly.

“We're not exactly sure yet, but” the nurse continued “all we know is that she was electrocuted.”

Odd stared up at the nurse, then over to Max, who lay peacefully, on the cushy bed.

“Is she going to be okay?”

The nurse looked over to Max, then back to Odd and sighed. “I've already called the hospital, and they're on their way right now” she said to him. “You should know though, Odd, Max is dangerously close to slipping into a long-term coma.”

Just at that moment, two paramedics walked in with a gurney and announced that they were here to take Max away. As they picked her up and gently laid her tiny, limp body onto the gurney, Odd looked at Jim, who was still standing next to Ulrich.

“Jim, please let me go with her” Odd pleaded.

Jim hesitated for a moment, but decided to let him go. So, Odd followed beside the moving bed that

carried Max all the way to the ambulance, where he hopped in and sat next to her. As the two men closed the doors and drove off down the road, Ulrich began to wonder whether this had all been just an accident, or something more.

## 29 - Investigate

While all this had been going on, Yumi and Jeremy had been waiting by their usual meeting place by the vending machines, waiting for Odd, Ulrich, and Max to show up. It was now seven-thirty; far too late for their morning visit to Aileda. This was the main reason why Jeremy was feeling rather impatient at the moment.

At last, Ulrich came from around the corner of the walkway, but without Odd or Max at his side. Yumi and Jeremy stood up and walked over to him.

“What took you so long?” Yumi asked, pryingly.

Ulrich shook his head, looking a little dazed. “It's crazy.”

Jeremy gave him a curious look. “What's crazy? Where are Odd and Max?”

Ulrich looked at him and answered. “On their way to the hospital.”

Yumi and Jeremy had been nothing short of shocked after Ulrich explained what had happened. Jeremy, however, seemed to be more interested in what the nurse had said.

“She was electrocuted?” he asked.

Ulrich nodded, but then shook his head in confusion. “Know one knows exactly what happened. Not even the nurse.”

Yumi looked over at Jeremy, who sat next to Ulrich on the bench across from her.

“I'm not so sure this was an accident” Yumi declared.

Ulrich turned to her and nodded urgently. “I was thinking the same thing.”

Then Yumi grabbed her bag and stood up. “Well, you guys had better get to class.” She began walking away before Jeremy called after her.

“Where are you going?” he shouted in befuddlement.

Yumi turned her head, still walking. “I'm going to check out Max's room.”

## 30 - Xana Attack

Inside the girls' dorm, Yumi wandered through the hallways until she came to room 201. The door was still unlocked from this morning. Yumi cautiously glanced behind her to make sure she was alone, and quietly entered Max's room.

Yumi stood near the door, scanning the room and all its contents. A few text books, a backpack, some CD's, and a few pairs of clothes were scattered about the floor. Other than that there was no more than the bed and dresser.

Nothing seemed to strike Yumi as suspicious, or indicate any feasible trace of Xana.

She decided to have a closer look around, and began checking every nook and cranny of Max's room. She began rummaging through her book bag, turning her bed over, and searched every drawer, but still found no hint of Xana's presence.

Yumi stood up from the mess she had made, but felt no remorse over it, and began walking over towards the window.

Now there was something; the window was wide open. It was summer, but even the nights around here tended to get particularly cold. Max couldn't have opened it deliberately.

Then, Yumi noticed something twice as peculiar. On the wall to her right, near the outlet, was a stain of blood; probably from when Max electrocuted herself. Yumi bent down and tapped the tiny outlet every so lightly.

Suddenly, without warning, an inky-black shadow emerged from the outlet and swarmed above her, menacingly. Yumi stepped away and backed into the hard, wooden dresser behind her, tripping and falling to the floor in panic.

The shadow began to move in on her. Yumi had no time to move towards the door, no matter how close it seemed. She had to think of something, fast!

That was when Yumi spotted the glass of water sitting on the dresser above her.

With the reflexes of a cat, Yumi reached for the water and splashed it at the on-coming shadow.

The monster seemed to falter back, recoiling in pain. Eventually, it retreated out of the door and disappeared into thin air.

Yumi stood, bent over and clutching her stomach, trying to catch her breath.

As of now, Yumi was not only sure that it had been Xana that had attacked Max, but that Xana was

about to strike again, and very soon.

Shaken, but nonetheless calm, Yumi grabbed her backpack and sprinted out the door and down the hallway. She needed to find the others as soon as possible.

## 31 - Yumi's Warning

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At the hospital, Odd was now in room 18B, sitting next to Max, who lay asleep in her bed

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At the hospital, Odd was now in room 18B, sitting next to Max, who lay asleep in her bed. Odd was all too mortified. This is not the way he had wanted to see her, with tubes and little sensors stuck to her arms and head, the life-support machine giving a sharp blipping noise every few seconds. Only yesterday he had watched her smile, talked with her and made her laugh. He had been happier than ever before. Now, he didn't know what to do.

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Just at that moment, his cell phone beeped from his pants pocket. Without taking his eyes off Max, he pulled out his phone and answered.

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“Odd! It's Yumi. You have to come back! You might be in danger!”

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Odd stared blankly at the wall, unaffected by the unsettling urgency in Yumi's voice. “No.... I'm staying with her..”

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“Odd! Listen to me! I just saw Xana in Max's room! He's definitely after her, and if you stay there, he'll find you too!”

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“Good” Odd replied nonchalantly, as if in a trance. “I want him to find me...”

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“Odd! What are you saying?! Don't be stupid! If Xana finds you, he'll kill you!”

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With that, Odd pressed the end button and turned off his phone. As he sat there, still watching carefully over Max, all he could think about was Xana; how he would kill him, once and for all.

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Yumi stared at her phone in silence, and then looked up at Jeremy and Ulrich, who stood right across from under the bathroom doorway.

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“Well, when will he be here?” Jeremy asked urgently.

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“He... he says that he's staying with her.”

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“What?! That's crazy! Xana will find him and kill him for sure!” Ulrich shouted.

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“That's just it. He said....”

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Jeremy and Ulrich waited for Yumi to finish.

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“He said he wants Xana to find him.”

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Jeremy hitched up his backpack and frowned. “Well, we better go talk some sense into him.”

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“How do you suggest we do that, Einstein?” Ulrich said. “How can we possibly get to the hospital from

here..”  
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Jeremy pointed to the parking lot from across the field, where some cars remained parked in their spaces. Yumi and Ulrich couldn't understand what he getting at, but the second Jeremy pulled out a set of keys, they both felt the hairs on their necks prick up.

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