

CRASH!

The lab's ceiling shattered as sparks rained down. Scarlet lights pulsed across the cracked floor, and the emergency siren howled through the thick, humming air.

"RUN!" Ava yelled, dragging Kai by the wrist as a mechanical arm burst through the debris behind them.

Metal claws clanged against the tile, slicing the corner of Ava's jacket as she ducked into the hallway. The creature—a patchwork of steel plates and flickering wires—roared like a broken jet engine.

Kai didn't dare look back. "WHAT IS THAT THING?" he shouted, panting as they sprinted down the corridor, dodging overturned chairs and fallen computers.

Ava didn't answer. She just ran.

The hallway bent sharply, and the emergency doors at the far end began to slide shut—far too slowly. Ava shoved Kai ahead. "Go! I'll hold it off!"

"No!" Kai screamed. "We go together!"

Behind them, the creature screeched and leapt forward, crashing through the walls like they were made of paper. Alarms blared louder. The air tasted like smoke and battery acid.

Ava turned, grabbed a fallen fire extinguisher, and hurled it at the monster's chest. Boom! It exploded in a cloud of white mist, and for a second—just a second—it froze, whirring confusedly.

"Now!"

Kai dove through the closing doors just as Ava slid after him. The metal slammed shut, cutting the creature off with a final mechanical shriek.

Silence.

The hallway beyond was lit only by flickering red lights and the dim glow of EXIT signs. Ava leaned against the wall, gasping.

Kai stared at her. "What was that?"

"I don't know," Ava whispered, voice hoarse. "It wasn't supposed to wake up. Not yet."

Kai blinked. "Wait... You built it?"

She didn't answer. Instead, she stood, eyes narrowing toward the end of the corridor. "We need to keep moving. If that thing overrode its sleep code, the others might too."

Kai's face went pale. "There are more?"

A low thud echoed in the distance. Then another.

Boom... boom... boom...

Ava grabbed his hand. "We need to get to the control room. Now."

As they ran deeper into the underground complex, the floor trembled beneath their feet, and somewhere far behind, metal claws began to drag slowly across the walls.

The hunt had begun.