

The team awoke to find themselves wrapped in body bags. Emerging from them, they found themselves in the middle of a huge blizzard. They were rescued by a medical team, headed by a guy named "Jimmers," who told them "Get out of here any way you can, and don't give him your money!" He didn't say who he was talking about.

I forgot to mention, the players were wearing crappy jungle camo.

Where the team found themselves was at a mining facility on Cryolapse...a once-beautiful terraformed planet that "lapsed" and is 90% covered in ice, except for a small belt of jungle around the equator.

The team recovered and talked with Dale, the deputy director of the mining facility, and LaPierre, the director. LaPierre, a tall guy with white hair and a huge scar on his left cheek, asked if they had any money and they said they didn't have any (they did). He went upstairs and talked to a radio operator trying to figure out where the team came from, but the operator looked at a panel and said nothing was seen on radar (but his response seemed fishy). The pay at the mine is \$10/day, room and board is \$6/day.

The team met a bunch of characters for dinner: Rigger, a handsome driver and former park ranger/naturalist; Hop, a strong guy who didn't talk too much; Blade, a woman who gave LaPierre a nasty scar for some reason and fights bare-handed; and Deuce, an injured former military member (recon, sharpshooting).

A crazy guy back at the bunkers wanted to play Gammarean Roulette. He spun it and came up blank.

The next day LaPierre "recruited" the team to go investigate some disappearances from a mine shaft. They picked Rigger, Blade, and Jimmers for their team. This will help pay for the team's room and board and also give LaPierre a sense of the team's capabilities.

They were led in and got some basic gear and weaponry. Locked in the mine cavern, they found some ATVs with shredded tires, and dragged one over and used its light to illuminate the cavern. They lowered themselves down an 8 foot drop, and peeking around the corner saw some humanoids with engorged muscles, ripped flesh and disjointed limbs, who lumbered towards them. As each team member saw one, they had the chance to become afraid; only a couple did. (Rigger, the pretty-boy naturalist, became completely inactive through the entire fight due to fear.) Blade took the first bunch out with a badly-thrown but still effective grenade; more came at them. In total, the team took down 18 of these creatures, and learned the value of grenades in the process. A "boss" creature with a spider tattoo on his face rushed the team (ran over 100 feet in 10 seconds). The "Hand of God" delusional shooter on the team fired both his revolvers and would have killed him, except for some luck that saved the creature. But the team somehow beat down the bad guy and finished off the rest of the creatures.

Exploring the cave further they found a foul-smelling pool; they had Jimmers take a sample with his medkit and they left their gear behind and returned to the tram house, where they talked with Dale, who took the sample.

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After returning to the mining facility, having just fought off the weird monsters from the mines, the team handed a sample of the pool to the assistant director, then talked to the director about the weird creatures. He seemed sort of vague about how such things could be there, but appreciated their work and said he'd assign them to transport security the next day.

In the cafeteria, Rigger, the driver, was still in shock from the fight.

At the bunkers that evening, the crazy old man asked HOG to pull the trigger on his revolver because he wanted the Hand of God to guide his fate, but HOG declined. The man pulled the trigger himself and the chamber was empty.

The next day they were assigned to guard a Hacidite transport truck to Huddleton, Rigger and Rynna in the truck and the others in the armored escort vehicle. They took the plateau pass, and got stuck on the way up, but Jimmers got the winches set up right and got them on their way. On the plateau they noticed some vehicle tracks leading to a radio tower. They saw that a repair truck got stuck and was besieged by two large bears. HOG demolished both bears with the 25mm cannons. Jimmers got the truck freed and on its way. On the way down, both vehicles got stuck again...and Jimmers got them out again.

In Huddleton they dropped their loads and went to a weapon shop. Going back to the inn, they were approached by four men--deputies from Marshall Huddle himself. The deputy, Stacy Lamarr, said they were not in trouble but that Huddle just wanted to see them.

Huddle questioned them about the fight in the caves, then said he had a covert task: to find out if a rebel group had actually infiltrated one of the terraformers on the green belt of the planet, near the equator. They seemed to be sapping power from it for some reason. It wasn't in his jurisdiction but since the planet's livelihood was at stake, he figured it was worth sending the team. They accepted and went through the planning and preparations for starting out the next day.

They took two flyers down to the green belt, and on the way down they raced...HOG beat Rynna by a fair amount. To top it off, in trying to negotiate a landing spot away from the terraformer's SAM batteries, he found a perfect place to land that, when descending through the jungle, covered and hid the flyers completely.

Damien and one of the deputies, Sketch, walked from the landing site into a small town outside the terraformer perimeter. There they made their way to the bar, and after making a small inquiry about the rebel faction, found Sketch passed out from his drink. Damien didn't pass out,

but noticed that the lady running the bar had a tattoo on her arm of name of the the rebel faction (UPPG). Damien and another gentleman helped Sketch to the man's house, but he soon turned them out and Damien camped out with the now-recovering Sketch along the road. A jeep came by and an officer and four grunts jumped out and confronted the group, asking why they had been nosing around about the UPPG. He demanded they drop their weapons...or he'd shoot.

So Damien shot. And they made short work of the officer and the two grunts that fought. Another ran away into town (the townspeople had long since dispersed) and Damien took a single shot...no survivors. Damien and Sketch took the uniforms and the jeep, stowed it away outside of town, then made it back to the flyers where the rest of the team was encamped.

The team made many plans about distractions and bombings and such, but in the end they decided to scout out the gate to the terraformer's 'Intruder Exclusion Zone.' They scouted out two guards at the gate, stealthily approached and though one guard spotted them...it was too late. They were taken down, and the hacker Bree Havasher broke into the gates.

They then proceeded down the road toward the terraformer. They needed to pass one of the SAM batteries and had been warned about their ground defenses. Then they spotted a jeep coming down the road at them, coming past the battery. Jimmers set up the explosive in their jeep and set it off as the other jeep went by. Only one stunned grunt remained, and he expounded on how the UPPG wasn't bad, they just wanted to give power to the people against the corporate and authoritarian oppressors. But he wouldn't give up much useful information, and Damien finished the job.

They then walked right through the transport depot to the terraformer, using the uniforms of the first killed soldiers. They went to the large elevator for the transformer and proceeded to the Logic Control Center...where they found nothing except a bunch of wires that said 'routed to level 39.' They went to level 39 and rummaged about, and eventually found the Generalissimo rallying his troops. Damien, who had been stealthily moving about the entire floor, made a misstep and the entire set of troops saw him. The Generalissimo made appeals to the team, and the Master-at-Arms drew his machine gun...the grunts spread out of the area to both sides. The Generalissimo made an impassioned appeal to the group about what his work was...to help the oppressed of Cryolapse to be free of their masters, and powerful. But he was also quite evasive about what he was actually doing toward that end. He convinced Jimmers and the hacker Bree to lay down their arms, but the rest of the team held fast. The Generalissimo then grew tired and gave the command for his troops to fire.

A grenade from Damien cleared much of the room, but it did not deter the Generalissimo, who drew his sword and charged the group. Surrounded by foes, and without all their allies working for them, the team found itself in a desperate struggle...to be continued LATER!!!

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This week the team resumed the battle against the UPPG near the top of the quarter-mile-high

terraformer. The first round brought much blood to the team...so much that Hog had to sneak off with three wounds to a Jeep in the other room and nurse his wounds. Sketch went down pretty early in the battle, toe-to-toe with the Generalissimo. As the situation was turning to a bloodbath, Damien went to another Jeep and decided to turn it into a Vehicle of Mass Destruction. She slammed over a trooper, turned the corner into the room in the midst of the melee, and went into a skid, running over the Generalissimo that Rynna was tussling with...luckily Rynna dodged the Jeep...the Generalissimo got up a little bloodied, but only more convinced of his immortality.

Jimmers came back to the group by this time and began to fight off those near him.

At this point the master-at-arms had his first opportunity to let loose with his machine gun...riddling the driver's position and seriously hurting Damien. She gunned the engine a little to run him off the (unguarded) edge of the terraformer...knocking him down...but he grasped onto the ledge and watched his machine gun drop all...the...way...down... Then got up and climbed up under the Jeep. Damien slammed the Jeep into reverse to get away from the ledge, then the master-at-arms, blinded by fury, pulled the pin of one of his grenades and charged the group...BOOM! He was still standing somehow, though pretty roughed up, and Damien dodged out of the Jeep in case it was going to blow. He pulled another pin as everyone else cleared the area...BOOM!

Jimmers decided to fight off the Generalissimo but was laid down pretty badly. Bree the hacker came to and rejoined the fight in this time...and took out one of the UPPG grunts, only to fall in the melee.

The suicidal master-at-arms finally did himself in with his last grenade; the leader fell to the bloodied but emboldened team. Damien ensured there were no survivors...pushing the last fighter over the edge...taking the 'fast' elevator down.

The crew looked about to find their assisting comrades all perished in the fight. Including the hacker who was supposed to fix the terraformer.

About this time the terraformer started to come apart--probably the result of some sort of self-destruct initiated by the UPPG. Gases were being vented, power was failing, and ignition of the whole facility seemed imminent. Without Bree, the team decided to flee, but the power to the elevator was out. They rushed back to the control room and Rynna and Damien started toying with the controls. Damien managed to get the power back online, but Rynna accidentally initiated a self-destruct sequence for the SAM batteries...they launched their missiles at the tower.

Time to leave, the team got back to the now-powered elevator and made their way out. They found a troop transport and Damien took the wheel, knocking all other vehicles off the road as they drove in a rush away from the failing terraformer. The missiles hit the terraformer and

ignited the gases, causing a tremendous and dramatic end to the facility.

The team made it back to the hidden flyers and reported back to Huddle. He seemed displeased but also said he had other problems.

Huddle reported that while the team had been infiltrating the terraformer, he had found from the team repairing the tower that someone at the mining facility had been interrupting the functioning of the radar and transceivers at the tower cluster. They also decoded a message that was transmitted saying 'Send a medic.' Huddle sent his deputies to the mining facility to investigate, but arrived to find other problems...a huge 7 foot monster was rampaging the facility. Hanging back, the deputies witnessed as LaPierre tried to escape from the roof via a flyer...only for the creature to break off a radar dish, then throw it like a frisbee at the hovering vehicle, making it crash and killing the facility director.

In the mad rush of miners escaping the facility by vehicle or foot, the creature couldn't be found.

Shortly after this, a small commercial shuttle dropped near the facility, attempting to drop a medic in a body bag; Sneak tagged the flyer's engine and they captured the pilot. The vehicle was registered to a business on the primary moon, Cryolapse Alpha, better known as Blue Jewel.

Huddle informed the team that his theory was that a human trafficking organization was operating on the moon and supplying live bodies to the mining facility on request. The team was to reorganize, pick up new members, and head off to the moon to investigate.

But first the team had to rest. Hog was very seriously wounded, and over the next 10 days healed most of his strength back. Rynna was the only one that emerged from the fight without much damage; she'd been able to patch herself well during the fight.

The team picked up new comrades: Hop, the thief back from the facility (who had escaped by hotwiring a truck and making it to Huddleton); Deuce, who had been on transport security duty at the time of the rampage; and Stacy Lamar, Huddle's most trusted deputy.

The team boarded the Very Unique II in the evening and Captain Nimeaux welcomed all the passengers aboard. Once they were in orbit, Rynna and Damien checked out the bar...Damien enjoyed the blue whiskey a bit much and started going on about all the pretty stars...Rynna cut Damien off after that. Hog went to the rear observation deck to observe Cryolapse below...only to find the crazy old man from the bunkers, who asked him if he wanted to play a game...and without his gun (their weapons were confiscated to the hold) called Heads = Dead and Tails = live to see another day...he flipped tails, though Hog wondered what would happen if he'd flipped heads.

The team went to sleep, except Hog who was a little restless. He was confused when the

seatbelt lights came on and a recorded voice said that the captain had indicated the possibility of heavy turbulence. ...In space? Then he looked out the window and saw all the escape pods jettison. Not Good. He woke the other team, and a male flight attendant who was wearing a shirt embroidered 'Elaine' tried to assure them that that was 'standard procedure.'

He wasn't too convincing so the team decided to explore around the ship, while questioning the attendant. Hop unlocked the employees-only door leading to the lower level, getting a glimpse of a map along the way, and Damien began 'questioning' the attendant. The attendant became very agitated and was reaching for something in his pocket. Rynna frisked him and found he was reaching for a small oxygen mask. At this time Deuce, using his special-ops sensitivity, noticed that there was a strange gas entering the cabin. Damien put on the mask and, holding the man, herded the team downstairs.

There they were greeted by a couple of 'flight attendants' armed with revolvers, who fired on the group, harming Hog further. Damien used the body as a human shield and charged one of the guards...smooshing both the shield and the target into a bloody pulp. Hop picked the lock of a cargo bin and found it was the bin with their luggage. Hog found his weapons, and Hog picked a piece of random luggage and found a grenade in it. Another grunt rushed the team, saw the bloodied body Damien was toting, shrugged (didn't the the guy anyway) but then fell to Damien swiftly.

Rynna went around back near the engines and found another grunt waiting...this grunt shot Stacy Lamar dead in the face...Huddle's best man went down without a fight. Rynna ran back and grabbed a fire extinguisher off the wall to use as a heavy club. Damien grabbed a fire axe and Hog hid in the cargo hold.

Deuce, on corridor patrol, talked with some frightened crew members who were the actual crew members; after talking about it he learned that apparently the second shift was the team that took over.

After finishing off the patrolling grunts with a set of untraditional weapons, the team started looking about. Suddenly blast doors near the cockpit started to close, and the vents began to hiss with the familiar sound of an additive into the system...the team ran through them, even lame Deuce, who limped through easily.

There they tussled with the rest of the fake crew in the cockpit; Captain Blank as he called himself was a vengeful sort who specifically raided this transport because it held the team that killed his beloved Generalissimo. He almost killed Damien, who then slunk back out of sight; after a fair amount of blood exchanged the team finally took down the belligerent captain and his men.

Rynna gained control of the ship and found that a sleep-inducing neurotoxin had been released into the seating cabin (and then below decks). They disabled that additive and everyone

onboard regained consciousness. They found a medical trainee who tried to heal the team's wounds, but he was pretty useless. Rynna sped the ship toward a moon-based ambulance and they met within the 'golden hour' of healing, but the doctor on board had been drinking presumably because he, too, did little to heal the team's wounds.

A little disheartened to lose Huddle's best man, they made the dreaded call into Huddle, who seemed to take it with a bit of disappointed shrug. He'd seen good men die before; just not so many in such a short time.

Here the team sighed a sigh of relief and of pain; they had saved themselves, the passengers and the crew; but had not even reached the moon without having one of their comrades.

To Be Continued!!!!

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After arriving at the Cryolapse Alpha spaceport, the team looked for a hotel but realized the costs prohibitively expensive (\$200 a night, and they'd have to stay about 5 nights at least to rest up).

They decided to try their luck paying respects to Aguila Perennes, the Generalissimo's mother. They took a sky cab to her estate...a pretty swanky villa. Landing on the front lawn, they heard what sounded like a child screaming, but found it to be a peacock being chased by a woman (seemingly in her late 20s). They were sort of confused by this and rang the front door. The housekeeper informed them that in fact the young woman was Aguila.

The team introduced themselves to the woman and expressed their sympathy over her son's death. Aguila seemed little concerned by his death; he had apparently been a nuisance all her life, getting into trouble and such, so she wasn't surprised. Nor did she express hostility toward her son's killers; she invited them to dinner, and in fact to stay with her for the duration of their visit. She also requested that one of the gentlemen escort her to a gala event later in the week. Damien reluctantly assented, but was interested to find that he cleaned up well; his charisma went to 11 when dressed up.

After a few days of leisure and recuperation, everyone was well again and ready to move on with the quest. They followed up on the moving business that owned the shuttle that had transported the medic to the mining facility; they were met by a gruff man who didn't seem to know much but gave the team some info about the pilot's apartment. Shane, the pilot, had been in custody with Huddle but hadn't given up any information.

So they headed to Shane's apartment, in a windowless warehouse building with a metal door. They knocked, no answer. Damien dispatched the door and they headed up to the apartment. He then knocked, then kicked down the apartment door. The frame fell off. They looked around

the grungy apartment and listened to the messages...mostly a bunch of enraged messages from Shane's boss, one from Huddle's office and another from a guy named Astral talking about "the tickets." Rynna and Damien, searching about, bumped into each other and found two tickets to an event called Brainpierce featuring a band named Megaton Bomb Squad, occurring that evening; the same evening as the gala event.

Back at Aquila's residence, the team watched as the medic got dropped off in the front yard. He was a little disoriented and questioning of what was going on, and why he was placed with this misfit crew, but otherwise glad to be alive and not anywhere near where he had come from.

Damien and Aquila left for the gala, an event honoring Dr. Arcc of the university. He was receiving a humanitarian award for helping the children of Draco. Draco is a large planet that had been a cultural center; however a religious war between the Plurals and the Singulars led to a brutal and devastating nuclear holocaust. The children affected by radiation had apparently been helped by various growth hormone research performed by Dr. Arcc.

At the gala, they met Col. Crutsch, and Damien and the Colonel exchanged the fact that each other was packing at least some sort of weaponry (Damien sporting a survival knife stealthily strapped to his back, and the Colonel with two knives and a revolver). A silent auction progressed where many items were up for bid. Damien asked Aquila if she could bid on the keys for a ship; Aquila declined saying that this was just Damien's first gala. But perhaps he could pick out something else.

Meanwhile, the rest of the team packed into a sport utility flyer and headed off to the abandoned fertilizer factory where Brainpierce was located. A quiet bouncer was annoyed that it took so long for the team to figure out who was attending; eventually Hog and Rynna decided to go (even though no one else left behind could fly the vehicle). There were basically two types of people attending: really rich fashionistas and (possibly rich) emo punk types. Rynna and Hog wandered down the industrial staircase through the throngs and made their way into a large room, about 40' square, with a catwalk above the main floor. The band was playing analog electrical instruments and creating a sort of mix of heavy dance music and screeching feedback. Both Hog and Rynna could stand the music, but Hog got a little woozy from the strange smoke that pervaded the air.

They remained on the catwalk and watched the crowd a while, noticing that there was one guy on the side across from the main entrance, on a balcony watching the crowd intently. He was wearing a bluish coat with high shoulder pads, and various trappings, including a bandolier with what seemed to be a flare gun attached. He spotted Rynna and Hog and got spooked, and ran. Rynna and Hog raced out the main entrance; Hog getting a little lost in the crowd, undoubtedly due to the strange effect of the smoke.

The medic saw them running up and witnessed the strange man as he jumped in a flyer that was waiting for him and flew him off. Rynna hopped in with her team and waited a moment for

Hog to catch up, then zoomed off after their prey.

Through the warehouse streets they flew, and Deuce, told to fire, fired off a shot at the other flyer though it only nicked the surface. They reached the spaceport, filled with lots of flight traffic, and the stranger's flyer slammed into a passing vehicle at top speed, causing the ship to go out of control. Everyone inside hit their eject buttons and the stranger ejected, but the crumpled metal of the chassis caused the two in the back seat to eject right into the hull. The pilot ejected but into flames.

As the pursued man's parachute opened, Rynna piloted her flyer underneath him; he hit some buttons on his cuff computer, and as the team tried to decide what to do, another flyer came along, with a door open, and the man barely jumped safely in. The chase was back on. They flew through a factory zone and Astral's steady hands got a shot off at the team, doing no significant damage to the flyer, but busting a smokestack.

Meanwhile, at the gala Damien spoke briefly to a woman who introduced herself sort of clumsily as Dr. Fenner, er, Fentrer or something. She was some sort of researcher who had an interest in Arcc's work.

But the chase was not on for long. The team flew into a river canyon and Rynna completely outmaneuvered the other vehicle, to the point of coming right along side allowing the medic to taunt them. The chased pilot freaked out and complied with the team; the man in the seat, who the pilot called "Astral," wanted to keep in the chase but succumbed to the medic's taunting. Suddenly a cop flyer came up behind and everyone pulled up to the canyon ridge.

The cops called for the engines to be shut off and for everyone to hit the ground. Hog dove and fired a shot at the cop, somewhat inexplicably, taking the cop down hard. As the other cop drew his gun he also got shot at and shaken, such that he ran off into the bushes. The medic fixed up the shot cop and placed him back in the car but took a "helper's fee" of \$45. The team then took Astral into their own car, the medic stripping him of his flare gun/mini-grenade launcher. After a mild interrogation Astral said he wanted to go to the museum, that "she" would tell you everything. So they went to the museum.

There they marched past the dumbfounded valet and ticket agent. As they entered, the researcher approached Dr. Arcc and accused him of stealing all her work. She had been working in the mines all this time, on things people wouldn't imagine, and he takes the fruit of her work and gets all the accolades and money for helping the children. But that's not the nature of her work. Damien asked what WAS the nature of her work, and she said "I'll show you" and pulled out a syringe and injected herself; she grew into a hulking, bloated monster of the type the team had encountered back in their first mission on Cryolapse. The monster picked up the podium and threatened Dr. Arcc, as the team fell into combat mode. The gala attendees mostly hid, vomited, or ran for their lives; one ran through a window and lost consciousness. The beast dropped the podium on Arcc, taking him down, then Deuce got a good shot off at the beast. Hog

pulled both his revolvers and fired his good hand to the beast and the other to the limping, escaping Astral, and got both. Damien sprang upon the beast and eviscerated it. The medic watched this carnage with some confused detachment.

The carnage was over quickly. A SWAT team came and to the surprise and relief of the team, was aware of the team's actions; apparently Huddle had coordinated with the local law enforcement to keep them out of trouble--for now.

On the steps of the museum the team gathered; it had been a bloody day. Astral, still alive through the arts of the medic, was talking; he didn't know much but he promised to help them if they could follow the money, along a project named "Baxter." Dr. Arcc was too fatigued to speak, but perhaps could be spoken with later.

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Back at the Perennes Estate, the team received a call from Huddle, who informed them that after the cop-shooting fiasco, he could do little more for them. He mentioned that Blade is now working for him, and that though he wishes the team well, and harbors no resentment, if they attempt to kill another officer or innocent, he will be the first in line to pull the trigger.

At the hospital, the team talked with Dr. Arcc, who was in traction and didn't have much more useful information. He said that Dr. Fenner had been a student of his and had been getting illicit funding from Project Baxter, but that he did not and what he did was take ideas from research she had done and apply them to his own humanitarian work, helping the children of Draco. Turning up the meds made him feel better, but he didn't seem to know any more about Project Baxter.

Astral was also laid up at the hospital, and had ingested or otherwise taken a large number of medications. He seemed to have problems distinguishing plural from singular. He seemed very upset with his name: "Ass-Troll." He mentioned his sister Astrid and also seemed to think that Gil was a beautiful spider queen. He also informed the team that he had been in contact with his underworld connection Shade on the planet Crossroads. Shade both supplied bodies for money, and also had something to do with funding Project Baxter. However, Astral owes Shade a lot of money for the bodies, money he never collected from LaPierre at the mining facility, so Shade wants Astral dead. The only way to get to Shade is through Astral, who demanded that the group find a way to escort him to Crossroads...however it costs about \$5,500 a head to go, which is more money than the group could afford. The team decided to leave the hospital with Astral; the nurses didn't seem to mind. The team's medic swiped some extra meds for future use and walked Astral out, although he made rickety wheelchair sounds the whole way.

Leaving the hospital they ran into JJ, a private in the Interplanetary Zone Control (think: state patrol for planets), who wanted them to come with him to see Col. Crutsch. They were escorted to a shuttle that took them to Crutsch's ship, the Superior.

There they met with Crutsch who told them he needed a team to go to the nuked planet of Draco and disable a missile defense system that was preventing them from performing recovery efforts on the surface. All inhabitants of Draco are considered in violation of protocols that, after the nuclear war, demanded that all people leave. He stated that the defense facility was guarded and that there were probably a few hundred people total on the surface. He had sent down a drone and found that in a neighboring city there was a subway that the team might be able to activate and use to get near the facility. A small drop ship could get the team in but any larger ships would be impossible with the given air defenses.

The team was told to assemble additional personnel in support of the strike. At the sick bay they found Stitch and Macho involved in some sort of not-entirely-medical activity. Macho was a pretty obnoxious braggart who thought quite a bit of himself, and Stitch seemed to be a fairly bold and overconfident medic. At the training room they found Heavy, a heavy gunner who was quite hard of hearing, and Granola, a do-it-yourself kinda guy who expressed a continuing flow of unconventional ways of doing things.

At the mess hall, the grunts on board shied away from Damien, having heard tales of his bloodthirsty exploits.

The medic shot some pool and won some money off of Stitch. He then went to the bar and talked to Crutsch, who had no particular remorse for the people left on Draco, saying that they had every chance to safely leave the surface, and that they were standing in the way of progress.

A couple of days into the trip to Draco, a distress call was received and Crutsch assembled the team to greet the ship as it docked. As the airlock was readied a couple of well-dressed young men came out and began espousing the 'one god' view of the universe, and selling their books. The team called up Crutsch to see what he wanted to do with them; he said it was OK to let them on the ship. The medic followed the evangelicals about the ship. They went straight to Crutsch's office and talked to him for a while, then went about the ship for the next few days selling and giving away their books.

The team then prepared to go to Draco. As they neared the landing zone, they evaded a dust storm and Stitch noticed a really nice ship on the ground, pointing it out to the group. Rynna recognized it immediately...her ship! It had been stripped of external weapons and seemingly of its engines, and looked like it had some battle scars. Otherwise it looked to be intact, though it was lying among other derelict ships.

The pilot bungled the landing and the team emerged in the middle of a raging dust storm. They struggled to cross the street to get to the subway entrance, then Damien and Hop had to go back to get the generator. Hop lost his grip on the way back, but Damien pulled both the generator and Hop back to the safety of the entrance. The team then carefully staked out the

station and Granola set up the generator. The generator worked fine, but something was draining the power. Instead of having 4 hours of power they only were estimated to have one.

Damien took the wheel of the subway tram, and having some immediate difficulties at first (the power all shut off for a second), got the tram working properly. There were three choices of path; the green line was the shortest but was reported by the drone to have some cracking in the structure; the red line went further down and passed by a power relay; the yellow line went further out into the city outskirts and would take longest. The team decided to check out the power relay.

Traveling along at a regular speed, they took the red line and had to make a sudden halt as they found deep water on the track. This seemed to be the source of the power drain. They decided that rather than tackle fixing anything, they would go back and head out the green line. They did so, and though they encountered a major fracture in the green line rail, Damien jumped the track and the team continued on their way.

At the subway station, two feral dogs greeted them. They medicated some meat from an MRE and fed it to the dogs; one ingested it just fine, so they had to shoot it. Rynna felt a sharp pain in her neck that quickly subsided, but couldn't see anything.

Hop took point and spied out the station and streets above. There was no one and nothing of interest in sight. The team made its way to an old department store at the corner up the street from the defense facility, which had been placed in what had been the old city park. The team camped out amid the stripped mannequins and observed the street activity. Deuce camped out on the third floor and oversaw as Hop snuck in close to see what was happening, as darkness had fallen in on the city.

The defense facility was like a large cylinder, 150 feet high on all sides, except for a sloped cut in one side, apparently used for vehicle entry. At the top of this slope about ten guards were playing a game like basketball.

Hop was successful in creeping up to a shed that was on the right side of the slope. He then proceeded to crack the electronic lock and opened the cargo doors. The guards were very suspicious at first but then ignored the activity.

At this point the team decided that using the mannequins as a diversion, in a method to be determined at a later date, would be a good idea, so they carried 22 mannequins across to the shed. The team then spent a large portion of the night trying to figure out different ways to make their approach into the secured facility.

The idea at the end was to place mannequins in the two troop trucks that the team found in the shed, and rig them to blast through the fence and up the hill. After those blasted through, a motorcycle with a mannequin full of grenades would be sent up the hill as well, to take out one

of the gun emplacements at the top of the hill.

The plan struck a difficult start as the first truck failed to break through the fence. Though there was much noise, the guards at the top still were playing their game. Eventually they got the first truck to go through, and backed up the second so it would hit at greater velocity, and both trucks charged up the hill. One was stopped by cannon fire as the other veered off to the right and slammed into a few walls. It hit one and dumped all its mannequin riders, then careened off and over the head of a frightened guard, finally smashing near the main doors to the defense facility. One guard charged a mannequin and slit its throat.

The team began a halted set of attempts to charge the hill. The motorcycle was launched but did no damage to the intended gun. Hog ran into a rain of fire from the guards lined at the top of the hill, and quickly retreated as Stitch began efforts to patch him. Hop ran into fire and took heavy fire; Stitch helped to stabilize. Granola ran for cover behind a wall but was hit before he could make it; the medic went to stabilize him as well.

The leader of the guards had been manning the large anti-vehicle cannon and kept falling to multiple wounds inflicted by the company. Rynna and the medic charged behind the hulk of the first truck, but the leader blew it away with his cannon and exposed them. Making a last-ditch effort, the medic whipped out his grenade flare gun and aimed between the two guns. His aim was true and he toppled the last of the guards.

The team secured the area but found that Hop had fallen. His bravery and stealth displayed earlier in the evening had helped them tremendously, but he was now laid under. The team gave him a proper sendoff.

They then stormed the main doors of the facility and found a bunch of unarmed technicians cowering, most running out the door. The team planted a charge of plastique and exited the facility to blow the Primary Control Unit. JJ asked them to show visual proof of the explosion before he could send down a recovery team. The group did so then proceeded outside to clean up and wait. Gil got a sharp pain in the back of his neck and proceeded to extract what looked like a charred chip. Gil found the same chip in Rynna's neck, also blown. Damien and Hog volunteered to see if they also had such a chip in their neck, and in fact they did. Gil took the intact chips and put them in a plastic bag.

A few minutes later JJ called in nervously and informed the group that, though he wasn't supposed to tell them, he had to...Crutsch had launched a nuke with the defense facility as ground zero...to arrive in a little over 20 minutes. Apparently Crutsch had been planning this all along; once the air defenses were gone he wanted to ensure that he could take out the residual forces on the ground.

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The sun broke and a man poked his head out of the defense bunker. He yelled at them for destroying the defenses. Then Damien told him that there's a nuke headed for them...and the guy got a little freaked out. He kept his wits enough to hit the air raid siren, and suggested that the team take motorcycles to the subway. Some of the team tried to get the cycles started, but they couldn't quite get them all going, so they had to shamle their way to the subway, taking about four minutes. When they got there the guy, Lectro, told them that there is a power coil/engine that they can use to power the tram, and suggested that if they have enough time they can haul the engine over to the tram and hook it up there. The team decided to do that, and as they hauled the big engine over they drop the back end, but Granola single-handedly picked it up.

JJ called into the crew and told them to use another frequency so that their communications wouldn't be intercepted.

Rynna realized that this was one of the engines from her ship. Lectro was shocked, as if he'd seen a ghost, then said they'd have to talk about that later.

Damien tried to drive the tram but got it stuck; a minute later she figured out how to max the speed out and it was on its way hurtling down the tracks. They decided to take the Red line, which was the flooded one, but it went lower and they figured it would be safer.

As they reached the water, they hydroplaned right to the center of the flooding, where a control platform was situated. Lectro jumped out, slid, and got zapped in the electrified water, but managed to pull himself out. Quickly assessing the panel, he flipped the switch for the emergency drain and the water was all cleared in an amazing 8 seconds. Off they went again.

Then it hit. A huge shock blasted through the subway, but by the time it reached the tram it was a pretty harmless shake. Seeing a blast of dust and rubble come their way, they ducked, but the tram absorbed all the damage; all that it sustained was a slightly popped window on one side.

When they reached the New Hope subway station, they were pretty shaken. Lectro gathered his courage and led the group up the stairs, careful not to look back at the devastation behind them. He led the team across the street and through the city park, where a set of three statues had stood: three hands pointing up, but a drone was laying across two it had apparently knocked over. "Crutsch," Lectro said, and the group said nothing.

Lectro worked his way to a small alley and down an innocuous stairway leading to the basement floor of a house. He opened the door, and a long steel-lined corridor lay before them. At the end of the corridor was a small room; he asked the team to remove their weapons if they were to follow him to the inner chamber. It was a sacred place to the Draconians, he said, and weapons were not allowed. The group left Gil with their weapons and entered.

Inside the door was a 100' diameter circular room about 40' high. It had three spires that went

up most of the way to the dimly lit ceiling. The walls were made of mud. At the tip of each spire was a glowing light; they rose in order to the last, about which a halo shone.

Lectro introduced them to Dena. Dena was the leader of the Draconians here. A battle-worn woman in her mid-thirties with a crew cut and soldier's build, she greeted the crew with some trepidation. She explained the beliefs of her people, and told of the exodus from Earth. When Earth was becoming used up, a series of three supernovae appeared high in the sky, the last of which formed an Einstein ring about a red dwarf. As scientists studied this most unusual phenomenon, they discovered that the dark red dwarf had habitable planets, and soon after a fleet of multi-generational ships were launched for the new worlds.

Because of this, her people have believed that there is more than one god, that in fact all stars are gods that live and breathe life into their planetary systems, fostering civilizations like a mother raises her young. And when they die, they do so in a grandiose fashion worthy of a god.

HOG had a rough time hearing all this, but muddled through. Dena then described her brother's experiences with then-Major Crutsch; Crutsch had cut off his finger and demanded to know how many fingers he had; Dena's brother would always say "ten." It turned out that Dena's brother had been the man at the gun at the defense facility, but she forgave them for his death, blaming Crutsch instead. She vowed to avenge his torture and his death, with that of Crutsch.

She also spoke of the engines from Rynna's downed ship; she was shocked to realize that Rynna was its captain, and told her the story of the downed ship; how it had been commissioned by underworld supporters of the Draconians to deliver necessary supplies. How it had been secretly followed by Crutsch's bombers past the disabled air defenses. When the Draconians saw the bombers, they had no choice but to raise the defenses again, meaning certain death for the cargo ship. But the ship not only evaded the defenses, but also took down many of the bombers, in an amazing struggle. The ship eventually foundered and plummeted toward the planet, making just enough of an effort to make a crash landing outside of New Hope. As the Draconians came close to cheer the pilot, an escape pod raced to the sky. All that they could find of the pilot was a necklace, caught on the pilot's seat.

Dena showed the necklace to Rynna; Rynna recognized it as her own.

Dena then said that of the four engines, one was used for the subway system, one was used in the hospital in Polydeus and most certainly lost in the blast, one was severely damaged in the crash landing and salvaged for parts, and the other they had used in New Hope for general powering of their habitation and defense systems. But a man, Yonn, had stolen the engine just a few days ago, for what purpose, they didn't know.

Yonn had purportedly come out of a canyon just after the nuclear war and pronounced himself a prophet of the stars. He said he had a vision that his people must be led to the stars; a promised land that only he knew of and whose location he would not speak of to others. He did

not want others barring the way to salvation. Dena suspected that Yonn had stolen the engine to power his own interstellar ship, but she couldn't be sure. She wanted to confront Yonn, and decided that she would use the crew as "leverage" in discussions with him to see if they could work together to fight Crutsch.

Dena then proposed that the team get some necessary sleep; it was fifty miles to Yonn's encampment in an old missile silo, and they would take an old propeller cargo plane to get there. Rynna giggled at the opportunity to fly one of these classic planes.

Though HOG had some difficulty sleeping in the polytheists' cathedral, he finally did and had a vivid dream: He was in a swanky hotel elevator, going up. It went to the 103rd floor. The door opened and a young, pixie-like woman with short spiky brown hair, a boarding school crested jacket, white-and-pink checkerboard leggings, and saddle shoes, greeted him. A voice in the back of his mind said "Astrid." She led him to a large suite filled with heavy equipment luggage and walked to the window, and peering out, said "This looks like a perfect view from here." She then picked up a long case and sauntered up to him, holding it in front of her and opening it.

Damien woke up first, and at the request of Dena, woke the others up as well. They loaded themselves and a Jeep into the cargo plane. Rynna took the yoke as the ground crew opened the hangar doors; the hangar was built into the side of a hill, and a street, doubling its use as a runway, led away from the door. Rynna fired up the engines and led the plane down the runway for an easy takeoff. HOG sat in front gun, Damien in the middle upper turret, and Deuce in the tail.

After a few minutes HOG spotted some drones off to the right. The drones engaged the cargo plane, but Rynna got the jump on them. In the first few moments, the plane had the upper hand and the gunners hit one of the drones; not fatally, but enough to hurt it. Over the next couple of minutes, shots were exchanged and three of the drones fell. The plane was soon within range of the missile silo, and anti-aircraft artillery took down another drone. Dena was pleased that the AAA was not directed at the plane.

The team landed and exited the plane entirely. Dena rode shotgun in the Jeep as HOG drove. The rest of the team was either in the Jeep or following on foot the short distance to the complex. The missile silo complex was surrounded in 12' high chain-link fence topped with concertina wire, and 30' watch towers were placed at regular intervals around the perimeter. A man in the gate watch tower recognized Dena and called for Yonn to see if they should enter. The group could see that Yonn was on a box addressing his men. Yonn was a man in his fifties, wearing a fur cloak with his chest exposed, and seemed to have a strong hold over his men. They were hanging on his every word.

Dena and the team were let into the compound and spoke with Yonn. He said that he intended to leave this planet, that there was no use in fighting anymore, as evidenced by Crutsch's use of a nuclear weapon. Dena was frustrated that Yonn was insistent on leaving, but after some

further conversation, one of the watchmen noticed a drop ship was heading their way.

The team took up defensive positions mostly in a ditch. Yonn stood off to the side of a cinder-block hut adjacent to the silo. The drop ship neared and a voice came over the loudspeaker demanding a peaceful collection of all individuals. All people would drop their weapons and be taken aboard; they would not be prosecuted. Dena, Yonn, and the team had no interest in this, and after 60 seconds the drop ship fired two canisters of tear gas at the group, falling a little off target and not accounting for the wind drawing the tear gas away from the main line of fighters. Then the drop ship landed and deposited a bulldozer on the ground. The bulldozer charged toward the fence, right across the clearly-labeled mine field. After about twenty feet in it hit a mine, killing the driver and bringing the bulldozer to a halt short of the fence. Then the drop ship released a ground assault crew, headed by Heavy. Macho manned a machine gun on the side of the ship, and Crutsch stood in the door facing the team.

Dena, on seeing Crutsch, immediately raced out the gate and along the back side of the mine field. Crutsch and Macho opened fire, and Yonn ran into the cinder-block building. HOG chased Yonn, suspecting treachery from one he considered a false prophet. Others positioned themselves to take out one man: Crutsch.

Dena made it to the mine field, twelve feet from where the bulldozer lay, then jumped the twelve feet and landed prone on the ground. Crutsch and Macho opened fire and wounded her to her very bone; she had little life left. The entire team was now bent on saving her; Stitch stood up and waved to Macho to try to dissuade him from assisting Crutsch. He saw her and immediately was taken...he had never felt that way for someone before. He let go of the gun, and at the same time Crutsch, seeing one of his mortal enemies, jumped out of the door and ran towards Dena.

HOG by this time had followed Yonn into a tunnel leading to the missile silo, and suspected ultimate treachery. He took both his revolvers and let loose. Yonn fell pretty easily, and limped a little further. Another couple of shots and he was dead, unable to breathe any clues for the team. His henchmen turned on HOG, but he managed to present some facts that helped to dissuade them from killing him on the spot.

Heavy's men had just reached the perimeter of the base when several things happened: Crutsch found himself in too many crosshairs and fell, mortally wounded. Dena took her survival knife, and in a fit of vengeance, fulfilled her vow, and cut off one of Crutsch's fingers, then plunged the blade into his heart.

Macho ran directly to his heart's desire, not minding that his path lay directly through a mine field. He ran in about twelve feet, then realized that he hadn't really made a good choice. We wasn't really sure how to get out of the mine field, either.

Heavy, perhaps a little wary of a looming battle without his leader, relented in his attack and

called off his men. The drop ship pilot, seeing the carnage, turned tail. However, one of the AAA batteries got a good shot off and, though not severely damaging the ship, damaged the control unit and the pilot managed to get the ship out of range without crashing. However, it could not go too long without proper control.

The battle ended. Dena assessed the situation and determined from Yonn's henchmen that he was planning to immediately launch himself in a missile in the silo. The missile was only suborbital, so the idea was to use the engine to continue the flight into orbit and then into interplanetary flight...but only Yonn knew the destination.

The team tries to call JJ on his special frequency...they get nothing. They try the standard frequency and get someone other than JJ. They ask if they can talk to JJ and he says that JJ is not available at this time. The man then asks who this is, they get Heavy to do the speaking. The man asks what the status is and Heavy says everything is secure. Then the man asks for Crutsch and Heavy pretends he doesn't hear and talks about when he had crutches. The team decides this isn't a really useful approach and cuts the call.

Stitch tended to Dena and healed some of her wounds.

So with Yonn and Crutsch dead, a launchable missile usable as a spaceship, and their leader Dena still alive, all after being 20 minutes away from annihilation, the team felt pretty good. But where to next? Only time will tell.

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The team decided to deal with the downed drop ship, and Rynna fired up the C-130 and Damien, HOG, and Dena piled in, loading in a Jeep as well. They got up and spotted the drop ship, put the cargo plane down and Damien, HOG, and Dena headed out in the Jeep. The ship was moderately damaged. Damien poked her head in the side door and spotted the pilot up by the cockpit. Damien popped the pilot with her M-16, no questions asked.

The team asked Dena if she could recommend anyone to repair the ship, and she said she did have someone in mind.

Back at the missile silo, Lectro and Granola worked on removing the engine from the ICBM that Yonn was going to use to leave Draco. Even though Lectro had the schooling, Granola apparently had the magic touch as he could have single-handedly decoupled the engine.

Dena brought over a man named Beauregard to repair the drop ship. Beauregard had been part of the crew that built the missile silo, and was stranded on Draco after the nuclear war had broken out.

Gil and Grunt called up to the Superior to try to clear up the situation with Crutsch's death. Gil

hatched a plan to make it seem Crutsch was on anti-psychotic and other powerful drugs. He and Stitch loaded up the body in way to support this suggestion. In the call to the Superior they arranged for a drop ship to come by; when it did a few hours later, Lt. Col. Brave introduced himself. He insisted on taking the body, and Gil convinced him that he was in the process of reconnecting with the rest of the away team. He also left 10 days' worth of MREs and iodine supplements with Gil. The drop ship took up the grunts under Heavy's command and Crutsch in a body bag, but left Macho and Grunt with Gil.

While Damien and the drop ship repair crew camped out on site, he had a dream. He was in a bar, late at night, no one in the bar, not even a bartender. It had a wraparound vista of a red dwarf, burning darkly, filling the view. He turned to a bar tv, where a bulletin about a bombing of a hospital was running. They showed the face of the suspect, and Damien took the butt of his M-16 and smashed the screen. He left the bar and walked down an empty street lined with televisions all playing the same bulletin. He took his SAW and opened fully automatic on the tvs. When he looked in the shards, he saw his face reflected...the same face he'd seen on the tvs.

When the repairs to the drop ship were done, Rynna flew the drop ship and HOG piloted the C-130 back to New Hope. HOG put the bird down gently on the mock-road runway leading to the hangar. The team then began to work on Rynna's ship, attaching the engines from the ICBM and the subway back to her ship. Beauregard was able to speed up what should have taken 5 days to one.

Dena then gave the each of the team members a Warmstone necklace. Warmstone looks like a shard of coal, and though it felt normal Dena said that it maintains its temperature...exuding a warmth in extreme cold. She said that they are old as the planets, as the stars made them. This gave HOG a bit of a shiver, but he accepted the pendant all the same.

The team then blasted off toward the Superior. Rynna had a rough takeoff, but made a precise docking. They were greeted by Lt. Col. Brave, who informed them that they needed to offload Astral from them, and that JJ had been dismissed from duty by Crutsch for his communications with the team. JJ could possibly be reinstated, but it would take months or years and he would be unemployed in the meantime. The team was happy to take on JJ, and also bid adieu to Heavy, who felt he was up for a promotion. Gil, Stitch, and (?) took on the task of breaking into Crutsch's office to further plant evidence supporting the notion that he was a druggie. Two guards stood outside the door, but Stitch insisted that she should 'take care' of them for a little while, since she was ambidextrous. While she distracted the guards, Gil strategically placed drugs about and modified Crutsch's medical records to indicate an increasing trend of psychotic and irrational behavior, coupled with a dangerous mix of drugs. When all was done, Stitch insisted that Gil owed him one, and that not a word of this would be said to Macho.

Then off they went to Crossroads. Crossroads is a busy, mostly lawless free-trade zone where slums brush elbows with corporate arcologies. The team settled the ship down for \$200 and

Astral called his sister, Astrid, to arrange a meeting with Shade. Astrid paid for a large ground limo for the team, and as they headed out to Shade's residence, Astral insisted that they would not be allowed to have weapons, and should leave them at Astrid's apartment. Damien in particular objected to this, and she and Rynna both decided they would still carry knives in.

Shade's residence was in an area of town dominated by a large monastery, on a street lined with secluded mansions. The grounds were enclosed by a 12' brick fence, and an iron gate was opened as their limo came to a stop. As they walked a stone walkway through a lush garden, HOG noticed that the swallow-nests on the house walls were actually housing cameras, and the downspouts held gun turrets.

Two large guards stood outside the two-story brick house and greeted, then frisked the guests. Rynna and Damien willingly gave up their knives. They made fun of Damien's cheap switchblade, and offered to sharpen Rynna's survival knife while they visited with Shade.

They were led to Shade's office, which was the central room on the first floor, large and lined in back entirely with windows. He sat at a large desk covered in papers and opaque monitors. He was engaged in a conversation with several people about talking with the jurors, and that he'd get back in touch with his conversants when the verdict came in. He was a bit ragged and looked as though he was in his mid-forties.

He greeted Astral and berated him for owing him \$20,000. He said the only real reason he didn't kill him on the spot was out of care for Astral's sister. He was curious about how Astral had acquired this 'small army' that was surrounding him. He then asked the team about their experiences with Project Baxter.

After hearing this, he then described that he had been the financial middleman between Blue Vector, who was running Project Baxter, and the research facility. He also would buy 'chipped' individuals who had been previously used, then sold them off to the highest bidder. That's what he did with the group...LaPierre was paying to get quality help that would be basically captive labor.

Astrid walked in wearing a yellow romper underneath a chain-link corset, with knee-high boots covered in skull and kitten decals, a bandolier made of \$1000-a-bottle champagne corks, and pigtailed just behind her ears. She was happy to see her brother, then wanted a hit of halcitite dust.

Shade had a problem. He was used to having attempts on his life, but in the last week two such attempts far exceeded all others with respect to their professionalism. He suspected that Blue Vector was behind these, because it seemed Project Baxter dried up, and his contact had been acting more distant than he'd have liked. At this rate, he figured he wouldn't live to the end of the month.

Shade's desperate plan was to turn the tables on Blue Vector. He knew that Project Baxter was part of a much larger set of plots, and through chance and some effort, he discovered that there was a mainframe with the top-secret project information located at a VIP suite in the Blue Vector regional headquarters. He subsequently acquired the blueprints for the VIP suite, and developed a plan to infiltrate the facility and gain access to some of the files.

His plan was to have the team supply 'the help' for a dinner party being thrown at the VIP suites. Through his usual web of money and connections, he ran the company that supplied the wait and escort staff for the event, so he could plant the team in the building. They would be unarmed, and would have to use their wits and teamwork to gain access to the files. The plan involved having the team first attach a coupling to the power supply for the suites, then place a filtering device on the network hub, and finally access the console of the mainframe holding the files. Doing this would allow the team 60 seconds to transfer files. He also wanted the team to delete his file from their system; doing so would effectively void the contract on his life. For deleting the file, he would reward the team by fueling their ship, and by sharing the project information with them as well.

The crew would have two jobs they could fill: general help (wait staff, bar tending, kitchen help) or escort duty. Escorts would have access to areas that would be off-limits to others.

Gil, Beauregard, Rynna, Stitch, and Astrid signed up for escort duty. For this, they met the escorted parties: Ms. Cook, a woman in her 50s with long gray hair but a pleasing smile, and Drake Havasham, a large man in his late 30s with dark curly hair. Ms. Cook preferred Beauregard and Mr. Havasham went for Astrid, who had been given a serious makeover for the event.

The help was screened as they entered the VIP suite. HOG preferred to work in the kitchen, being a bit of an outsider, and noticed that the cook's assistant was Dale Staller, the deputy director of the mining facility on Cryolapse...LaPierre's assistant. The escorts walked in later with their escorted guests.

The main entertainment area was a large two-story foyer with a skylight that hosted a bar, tables, and a string quartet. The quartet leader told the guests that they were playing the best of "BEE-THO-VEN, MAHZ-ART, and BATCH."

The festivities began, and Rynna took the first break to go snooping around. She left the main foyer and found the men's bathroom and two locked closets. She might have been able to break the locks by force, but didn't want to attract attention so close to the foyer. She tried to go upstairs to the guest accommodations, but an armed and ready guard instructed her that the help were not admitted upstairs on any terms, although escorts could be admitted in the presence of a guest.

[someone got in a sword fight]

[someone played pool]

Through the evening, the team conversed with several guests in an attempt to learn more about Blue Vector's activities. In one curious incident, someone overheard two guests in the men's room; one commented that the guest in the next stall had large feet, big clown shoes, and the other said "Clown Shoe...don't open Clown Shoe, right? Heh, get it? Don't open Clown Shoe!" Another guest mentioned something about wishing he could "Diamond Screen" his daughter as he patted the back of his neck.

The Blue Vector chief for this division then began a presentation about how good the year had been and how much work lay ahead of them. He dimmed the lights and all about the room were projected immersive images of all the planets they'd affected.

Stich and Beauregard tried their hands at unlocking the various closets. On finding the power closet, he called into HOG, who was holding onto the power coupling and network filter devices. He asked for him to take the power coupler to him, and the guard at the entry noticed that in addition to a plate of escargot, he was carrying the coupler. He was very concerned about it, and HOG replied that it was an "escargot chiller." The guard was quite doubtful, stating that he thought escargot were served room temperature and looked it over intensely, but then decided it wasn't a weapon and handed it back. Beauregard then very adeptly placed the power coupling onto the live wires in such a way as to cause no interruption to the suite power at all. He then locked the closet door on his way out.

Beauregard returned to his charge who took him upstairs to her room--for purely innocent purposes. Later she took him to a soundproof room--which unnerved him a little, or perhaps excited him--and they commenced a dual meditation. Beauregard suffered some near-tragedies when investigating his first (base) and fifth (communicative) chakras...apparently his stint on Draco had brought his energy into dangerous misalignment. At the end Adele Cook thanked him for the experience and tipped him \$500.

Stich found the network closet in the hallway on the other side of the foyer and called JJ over on his break to place the network cabling, since JJ had experience with communications. JJ also was quite adroit in placing the network filter into the network, in such a way as to assist the final hacking process a little. He also noticed that a large number of cables were going straight up: an indication that the mainframe may be directly above them, housed in one of the VIP private rooms.

One of the guests, Diane Moon, walked up to the bar as Damien was tending it, and upon seeing Damien immediately let out a deathly shriek and fell to the ground in a swoon. Damien and Gil, thinking on their feet, swapped positions and Damien then withdrew to the broom closet. Ms. Moon, upon being revived by her husband, was surprised to see Gil tending bar, but he insisted that he'd been doing so the entire evening.

Dinner was served and the guests were occupied for a while. A bit of a way in, the president raised his glass in a toast, but on taking his drink he swooned and fell--poisoned! Gil tried to help, using his healing powers, but the poison was too strong. As the team tried to think of any last questions to ask him, his life slipped away. The guards, called in by the guests, put the facility on immediate lockdown.

HOG sprang into action; he'd seen Dale Staller mixing something odd at one point, and used his strength to pin him to a wall, demanding to know what he'd done. Staller confessed completely, and HOG called over to the guards, who took him across the hallway to the security station, then lifted the lockdown.

The guests were a little stunned but unsure about what was appropriate to do, so they continued their drinking. Macho started talking with a 16-year-old girl, Jenny, who was still bored, even with the murder. He turned on his charm and bragged about being a cop and that he was used to danger. He also suggested that maybe she could help him do something a little risky--breaking into a room upstairs. He passed off his guest to Beauregard, who didn't charm the lady as much as Macho, but the thought of defying her parents was pretty "cool."

Since Beauregard was designated as an escort and Jenny was an official guest, she could take him upstairs. The guard was a little suspicious, but it's not really the place of guards to judge the doings of their wealthy masters. Beauregard quietly picked the lock to the room they suspected held the mainframe, and had to cover Jenny's mouth as she squealed in delight.

The guard noticed the squeals and checked the two of them out as they entered the room...and took off his tie and placed it on the doorknob.

Beauregard then went to the console. He called in to JJ for some assistance, and easily got past the locked screen. He then went to look up Shade's file. He almost bungled it...about hit the 'alarm' rather than enter key, and had trouble pulling up the file. He ignored the problem and pulled up the project files. There were six projects:

- Dark Mirror
- Diamond Screen
- Baxter
- Crystal Dome
- Clown Shoe
- Finder's Keepers

At the advice of the team, he selected the first three, reminded that you should "never open Clown Shoe." They transferred just fine. He tried again to pull up Shade's file, and although it was harder this time, he was successful. Before deleting it, he read through it and committed most of it to memory. He learned about Shade's real name and background, and his habits and idiosyncrasies. He then rumbled up his hair a little and left for the downstairs.

The team then worked the rest of the shift as though nothing had happened. At one point, they

overheard one of the members saying “it’s just tying it all together like Crystal Dome” and there was some remorse that they hadn’t selected that file.

Back at Shade’s residence he shared the information gained from the project files:

Project Diamond Screen - Development of a mind-control chip

- makes subject 100% suggestible when key code is transmitted
- subject has no memory of events
- durable chip, shuts down neural impulses if ‘cracked’ or removed
- 100% complete

Project Dark Mirror - Development of a non-lethal DNA-targetable airborne virus and its cure

- Symptoms for 2-3 weeks
- < 5% mortality, < 0.5% mortality on DNA targets
- 80% complete; est. completion 3-6 months

Project Baxter - Biological Augmentation Experimentation of humans and other animals

- Subjects must increase strength by 200%
- Subjects must be capable of living for at least 2 years or 4 months when continuously used (no sleep)
- Minor setback; 95% complete; est. completion 1 month

Learning this, the team figured that perhaps these three could be combined to create some sort of army--perhaps spread the virus, then during treatment chip and morph some of the population. No matter what, it didn’t sound good.

Shade was very pleased that they’d deleted his file; he could tell the moment they had done so, because all the people that had been shadowing him instantly went off their duties, and all electronic traces from his communication lines were lifted. He commended the team and wondered what the next step for them was.