

## Star Spangled Skull

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# Star Spangled Skull

by [Whim\\_Wham](#)

## Summary

Directly following the action of Captain America : Civil War, an American magnate, Dell Rusk, bankrolls the U.S. government emergency response to the criminal departure of the Avengers.

# Prologue : The Red Skull Rebrands

## Chapter Summary

Herr Schmidt's back from his cubic trip, and he has a plan. Whim\_Wham felt that his MCU movie fate was too banal for such a colourful figure.

The bottle spilled a pinwheel of schnapps as it fell into the dark depths of the facility. The black armour, more than a little suggestive of antique plate mail, cocked its head at the faint splintering of glass far below as the shorter, feminine armoured figure by his side handed over a remote control featuring a glowing red button.

“Ah, it ist gut to be back from Valhalla!”

He brought a gauntleted fist down on the button. The facility began to wake from its long slumber. Lights, long dormant, stuttered back to lit life ; and machinery grumbled and fumed to action after seventy five years of inactivity.

The larger of the two armoured figures raised its faceplate, the Red Skull within smiling, hugely. He played with a tiny device clamped to his throat.

His voice registered the twangs and beats of an Alabama accent : “It’s time for us to become ‘Merican, Blaze, ma dear, and fight the *good* fight!”

He toggled the emergency release switch on his *Auslander* armour ; the panoply fell away, the helmet joining the bottle far below on the concrete factory floor : and apart from the red skull, he was dapper in a three piece sharkskin suit.

Hartsblud watched her chief with a wary Germanic ardor. He wasn’t exactly the same man who had literally vanished into Asgard five years previously. He seemed happier, and had been, over the week since he had re-recruited her, not at all his old, volatile self. With the forbidding and terrifying aspects seemingly gone, she had discovered that she was falling for Der Boss, even if she was very dubious about what it was that she knew of his newest plan.

She clicked her armoured heels, and, much more for her new feelings for him than for what he proposed, she enthusiastically cried ; “Ja, mein Chef!”

Johann Schmidt raised a bony brow at his chief crony’s performance.

Hartsblud raised her beaver, her forehead scrunched above thought narrowed pale blue eyes ; and scrambled together her best English approximation : “Uh...yes, my war chief!”

The Red Skull laughed aloud, rested a large, red hand atop the twenty point rack atop Hartsblud's helmet.

“Close enough, mein kleiner soldat!<sup>1</sup> There’ll be *plenty* of time for you to perfect your new amerikanisch.” The Alabama twanged German words for ‘my little soldier’ sounded great to the ears of the besotted Blud.

The onetime cipher clerk for the German High Command thrilled to herself, *He’s never called me that before! Does he...*

Johann Schmidt united his twang and his vocabulary : “Fire up the factory, sweetie ; we’ve got a country to protect from all sorts of *riffraff!*”

“Ja...I mean, yes, my liege!” She clicked her heels, jumped into the hole ; flared her flight system to blaze into the guts of what had been a World War Two Hydra production facility.

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<sup>1</sup> German : my little soldier

# Malling over History

## Chapter Summary

The National Mall would impress an ex Nazi!

Walking the National Mall was Schmidt's habit after lobbying on the Hill. The many monuments reminded him of how much greater the New World was than his old one. There was also a delicious irony to his security detail keeping a totalitarian bubble around him in the Ultimate American public space as he toured. Beside him, his relatively petite executive assistant—he was six foot two—sashayed her five foot eleven feminine frame draped in a suit only a tad less mannish than her boss'. A silver and diamond Edelweiss pin, rode on the worsted grey of the suit like a campaign badge. She had not entirely lost her Bavarian country girl big city goggle ; Schmidt was amused to see his alpha minion still sneak wide eyed glances at the seemingly endless monuments that cropped up endlessly within the park space of the National Mall. He had made a point of taking his day's end strolls with Blesse Flammen to educate his bumpkin minion in the ways of the modern world. Today's walk was especially significant.

The thirty foot figure of a man emerged from a roughly hewn cliff face. Rusk turned his angular, grey side burned head first to the statue and then to the severe prettiness of his executive assistant.

"Tell me what'cha see, angel."

Blaze tilted her fiery caesar haircut to consider the stonework. There were zero signs of contemplation : her brow remained smooth. Her lip curled but before she could follow it with a venomous comment, her boss tapped her head with his silver eagle headed walking stick. She jumped, looked at him, uncomprehending.

"It isn't Der Führer's world." His expression changed minutely, he looked directly through his underling. "It never was." The past cleared from his gaze. " He redirected his cane at the statue.

"That is why *he* lost."

Now what was behind her brow was properly engaged. "That? It is not the man, but something larger?"

Johann let his native language out to play : teaching was so much fun!

"Ja und nein."

The furrow in the pretty brow creased further : "It is both?"

“Güt !” He switched back to unaccented English.

“The man and the idea are part of what makes America the greatest country the world has ever known!”

“Here, anyone can be great?”

He tapped her shoulder affectionately with his walking stick ; readopted his American twang: “Every man-jack of 'em, suh-gah!”

She walked around the monument. The Skull waited, grinning his Rusk grin. Reading the memorial’s quotations, she called out, “But he was a pacifist!”

“I did not say he was perfect : I said he was great.”

The security component, situated some meters away were too well paid to pay any attention to the oddities, and accents of their boss’ conversation with his executive assistant.

“But what is he great for? Is it something about this despair mountain and hope stone nonsense?”

Rusk laughed.

“Metaphor obscures truth like golden arabesques of cloud hide the setting sun : well it’s simile.”

Blaze poked her flame haired head out from the corner of the statue.

“Was\*?”

“His greatness was that he did not believe in the Master Race.”

"Schwarz madness!"

Schmidt chuckled to himself at the irony of his racist android. *Not quite Transhumanist, liebchen ; I've got plenty of time to whip you into proper Futurist robot shape.*

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Further along the walk, by the World War II monument, Blesse cum Blaze finally asked the question that Johann knew had been driving her nearly mad all the time of their closely guarded stroll. She remembered to keep it American : “Please for the love of Gawd, spill Boss! Are we wheels-up on the deal, or what?”

Rusk pretended to scowl.

“You’re awfully pushy! I’m almost forgetting who’s the boss and who’s the hired gun.”

Blaze steadied herself against the stone of the North Pacific fountain within the elaborate memorial ; complained, in an ever southwards driving accent : “Ah know jus ‘nough to be

loos'n ma mind!" Johann appreciated the psychology of the smoother tones of educated affectation cracking under stress to reveal the root hillbilly truth.

'What a show! This is why she's my trusted lieutenant!'

She continued to devolve her speech pattern : "Why weren't I even there wit ya? It's far too 2016 for it ta be Man Talk, right?"

Rusk held up his hands in a conciliatory gesture.

"That would be difficult given that the Chair of the Homeland Security Committee is named Virginia Jackson Lee."

He didn't mention that, in his opinion, the petite fifty-something blonde Lee made the men on the committee look like a limp bunch of ladyboys.

Blaze dared a glare that left Johann Schmidt feeling an oddly mixed feeling of parental pride and nettled employer.

He dripped exactly the right amount of ire into his voice : "Am I not answering you to your full expectations?"

Blaze startled.

"Nein...No!, Boss! I am yours to command!"

"Well then, you have four months to hire the core team for AEGIS."

"Wunde...excellent!"

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Blaze Tisephone sat at her desk and looked over the top of her stack of dossiers at the white dome of Capitol Hill outside the window of her Boss' Cannon House Office Building office, and thought : ' Speer would have loved it here : it's just like his plan for Berlin!'

She returned her eyes to the open dossier in front of her, her eyes widening the more of it she read.

She closed the dossier, placed it on the very short stack next to the very tall stack.

Under her breath, she declared, "John Walker, Amerikanisch Übermensch<sup>1</sup>, welcome to AEGIS!<sup>2</sup>"

The part of her that was sexually frustrated, fully functional cyborg also hoped to welcome Walker to participate in other...duties. A thrill ran through her just thinking about all of that six foot four Aryan splendour. Then her unrequited ardour for her chief made her blush in shame. Blesse was as *complicated* a weibsbild<sup>3</sup> as she was an unsophisticated one.

Still, the blonde and blue eyed hunk in the photograph woke the needs that she usually and hopelessly reserved for Johann Schimdt. She squirmed in her seat, attempted to distract her hormones with the next packet bearing the interesting title, Prof. Cobalt & J. Awesome.

These two were interesting. Scuttlebutt had it that, before they had become part of Spiderman's rogues gallery one year previously, they had literally fallen out of a storm laden sky. She was some sort of snarky mad scientist ; he was her inordinately happy bodyguard. Currently, both were doing time in the SMAD<sup>4</sup> facility in the Bikini Atoll nuclear test reserve for an esoteric list of villainy including something called Unsolicited & recondite utilization of CERN LHC. What worked for Blaze was that they, besides being a physically striking couple—he was tall, raven maned, sardonically handsome in an oddly blue skin hue and Prussian like facial scar way; she was a striking athletic green woman with black hair done up in an elaborate braid—they were known to virtually no one outside of this Spider Man, and a select number of SHIELD and SMAD personnel : they were the perfect clay.

She placed the dossier atop Walker's ; continued reading.

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<sup>1</sup> Amerikanisch Übermensch : American superman

<sup>2</sup>AEGIS (AgEncy Guarding International Security)

<sup>3</sup> German: weibsbild :English : woman

<sup>4</sup> Supra-Maximum Atoll Detention



# A Capitol Meeting

## Chapter Summary

Cobalt & Dr. Jade Awesome have a meeting with their benefactor, Dell Rusk, at his visible D.C. office. His invisible D.C. Aegis command post will feature later in the story.

Cobalt looked great in the three piece suit and he knew it as he, accompanied by his annoyingly zestful mad scientist girlfriend, also dressed to the Capitol Nines in a tight little skirt suit that rested skillfully upon the dangerous knife edge of conservative & sexy, strode up the steps of the fortress-like Cannon House Office Building. As her bodyguard, he almost always always moved just ahead of her, but he loved the lively twitch of her hard little backside ; he had missed it, and the woman attached to it, during their six month detention in that odd tropical resort prison he knew as *Liberty Zero*<sup>1</sup>.

Jade caught him ogling her ; smoothed her skirt down, ‘accidentally’ tangling a finger in the hem to tug it up over the lowest curve of her posterior. He almost missed a step at the brazen peek of bare butt, an impressive bulge in his trousers speaking to his appreciation of the performance. She made a faux embarrassed little squeal, that, as the toe of her right flat didn't quite clear the next step, turned into an actual one ; the wide shouldered, cyan man behind her deftly caught her by the behind ; corrected the naughty skirt lift as if nothing untoward had even happened. In his arms, she turned her head to murmur something in a blue ear which then received an exciting flick of tongue tip along lobe. He smiled, put her down ; the two of them continued towards the office building entrance.

Behind them, on the sidewalk at the base of the stairs, a trio of business suited women, two statuesque with long dark hair ; a much shorter & much younger--not much north of twenty--slightly chunky girl with a short shock of magenta hair, eyed the same thrilling sight that had just evolved Cobalt from a Terri le to a fantastic bodyguard all in the space of three and a half seconds.

The brown eyed dark haired woman on the left tuned her head to address her tall green eyed companion on the other side of their short punky middle ground : “Who's the awkward bombshell?”

The brunette, envisioned the flash of pert, verdant backside ; murmured, “She's that Spider Man vill, Dr. Awesome. I'd heard she was hot, but hot doesn't do *that bod* Justice!” She gave a low whistle.

Magenta pouted.

"Sure, sure : it's very nice, butt If we're late again, Roxxon's going to fire our lovely asses!" To punctuate this exclamation the magenta haired gal reached behind her, grabbed the nearest cheek of both her companions.

The copper skin toned, high cheek boned woman on the left laughed throatily.

"Don't worry, Rach, we won't let anyone's end keep us busy butt *yours!* Isn't that right, Tans?"

"It's a fundament of our relationship, Cleo!"

Both bookend women grabbed a handful of their side of middle girl backside ; entered the building not caring a whit about the whispered comments of shocked D.C. office workers & tourists.

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The office was all angular black leather furniture, chrome accents, backlit glass tabletops, and indirect lighting. It possessed a curiously retrograde Futurist look which appealed greatly to Jade's mad scientist sensibilities ; what Cobalt saw was an office that didn't seem to fit the man whom put it to use. *Perhaps*, he thought, *This plutocrat hadn't yet had the time to give it the permanent look of solid oak old money...or something else's going on.* Even wolves had to scent for the presence of more dangerous predators ; his nose quested for lions, tigers & bears (Oh my!).

The woman that had led them in, a striking nordic blonde in a skirt suit that would have been conservative on almost any other woman, introduced them to the impressive man seated behind an equally impressive desk of what appeared to be cleverly inner lit obsidian.

“ Dr. Awesome, Mr. Cobalt ; my chef, Mr. Rusk.”

*Chef?* Cobalt stiffened a bit more than he intended ; saw that the fifty something man behind the smooth pane of inner lit volcanic glass desk had taken in his nonplused status with a keen scalpel glimpse of saxe<sup>2</sup> eyes.

Rusk's face broke out of its seemingly natural stormy glower into a sudden burst of sunny splendour as he expansively exclaimed, "It's our lill' joke : Ah cook up me up what Ah want th' Gov'ment folk tah jawbone ; she serves it up an' makes 'em choke it down!" He stood up, navigated around the horizontal monolith of the obsidian desk with a grace and speed which belied his wide shouldered bulk. He was in front of Cobalt, large hand extended, almost before either visitor could react.

“It's goddam' great to be finally meetn' ya'll!”

Jade took a grip that informed him that there was more behind it, if necessary. Rusk did not hold back when he took the hand that would have been normal if it weren't for its cyan colouration ; the two other people in the room felt jealous stirrings at the sight of the two clasps as they considered each other, the older man with an ever widening grin of appreciation ; and a surprised look on the younger man that slowly settled into a secure little sickle of a smile as they fought to an apparently mutually satisfying hand-clasp standoff.

Dell Rusk toned the grin down to a smile ; gestured to the side of the office populated by three chairs and a coffee table. They sat, Cobalt sprawled comfortably, one leg thrown over the armrest ; Dr. Jade Awesome perched on the edge of her chair, her booted left foot rapping a tattoo against the parquet flooring. Rusk took the remaining seat ; turned to address his assistant.

“Blaze, mix us some drinks ; make mine bourbon on th' rocks, won'cha, darl'n?”

She considered Cobalt and Jade with an Aryan gaze.

Jade held up an emerald hand. "Just a ginger ale, please!"

"Jade doesn't drink, but I do!" Cobalt stretched his legs out, pointed the sharp tips of his well polished brogues towards the ceiling ; answered the silent question with, “I could use a Depth Charge...assuming?” She cast a questioning look at the icy blonde.

Rusk raised his eyebrows looked at his comely executive assistant .

Jade shimmied her bottom slightly upon the chair, her thighs parting just long enough for a near subliminal flash of her full go-commando status. Rusk, directly across from her, continued as if nothing had happened ; Tisephone, behind and to the side of her boss, goggled at the indecency of the American hussy. Rusk saved her with a gentle nudge ; she fought down her fluster and replaced it with her former cool demeanour.

Rusk’s eyebrows lifted further; the blue eyes underneath look inquiringly at Ms. Blaze.

“I know liqu...booze, boss!” She rooted about in her updated Americana memory storage, drew out the pertinent data.

She retired to a bottle laden sideboard ; rustled up a soda can, one rudimentary binary drink of Samuel Adams Rebel IPA beer with a submerged shot glass of Jack Daniels bourbon, and a neat double of triple malt Johnnie Walker Odyssey whiskey. As Blaze efficiently plied her mixological skill set, the two guests casually probed the size of their new cage with seemingly idle chitchat.

Jade enthused : “It’s quite the office, Mr Rusk!”

“Yes,” agreed Cobalt : “You must be quite a mover and shaker to warrant such an office so close to the dome!”

Rusk shrugged. “Ah do what Ah can for 'Merica.”

Cobalt, having noted whom Jade had and whom she hadn’t flustered with her little skin show, decided to stop skirting the business end of the meeting with an almost direct question.

“And we’re here for what you can’t?”

That got a reaction, albeit a subtle one : Rusk minutely tensed in his chair, his nonchalant air roiling ever so slightly. Jade's reaction to his partner’s deliberate faux pas was as planned as it was unsubtle : she glared at him.

“Cobalt!...”

Rusk laughed hugely.

“She reminds me of you, Blaze!” Tisephone stiffened ; sloshed a tiny amount of extravagantly expensive Johnnie Walker on the wooden floor as she passed him his glass ; delivered the others spill free. Holding his leaded crystal tumbler aloft, Rusk toasted the visitors with, “To our spirited women folk : they are our greatest treasures!”

Blaze cum Blesse thought that she kept her face carefully neutral as she thought, *If only he’d plunder mine!*

Cobalt fished out his shot glass, raised it : “We’d be lost without them!”

Jade Awesome hoisted her soda, grinned hugely at the men, sipped ; tipped her glass towards Blaze with her own toast.

“And to the men in our lives! May they always fully recognize our value!” Jade noticed that the woman named Blaze winced ever so slightly at the toast.

The reactions to the arcane toast were : Rusk, chuckling, returned the toast, drank ; Cobalt raised a quizzical glass ; Blaze, thinking she knew what the crazy extra-dimensional American meant, surgically swiped her boss' glass out of his hand ; tipped it back at Jade, tossed the remaining contents of golden liquor down her throat ; returned the empty tumbler to her amazed boss' hand. Cobalt noted in the emotional flash which registered as quickly as the flickering in between the flash and cannonade of a dead-on lightning strike, accepted it with an amused ease which easily flowed back into his role as seemingly expansive host.

"Careful, hunbunch, that firewater's fit ta *rust* your guts!"

Blaze's blue glare laser beamed her boss as she very gracefully prepared her own double of Odyssey ; proceeded to treat it with more dignity than she had directed towards the man who was her superior in more ways than the guests could guess.

Rusk shrugged wide shoulders, and stage whispered conspiratorially at his guests. "I don't really want a record of my one o'clock with my good buds at Roxxon, anyways!" He winked, " 'Round these parts, you're like to attract notice if you're not hogging at least one trough!"

Both Cobalt & Jade nodded as they understood the gist without fulling comprehending the folksy metaphor of Rusk's jokey little admission. Rusk continued, "And as you ascertained, Cobalt, you and your lovely lady are here to help with those things best done one or two square dance steps away from my esteemed Capitol presence."

Laughing, the lithe Jade stretched her legs out, kicked off her flats, wriggled her toes. This time the dress rode indecently up toned green thighs without revealing meticulously shaved inguen. Blaze cum Blesse found this somehow more upsetting than the previous gash flash. Cobalt's simultaneous tug at his red silk tie mirrored his partner's seeming relaxation. Jade voiced their shared sentiment with, "There it is : the *actual* business!"

A dark quality that reminded Cobalt of a shark crept into the still otherwise relaxed face & form of Dell Rusk. "You don't have any qualms 'bout *black ops*, do ya?"

The couple traded a glance, and again Schmidt was intrigued by what almost looked like a telepathic link flashed across the quick eye contact.

The bodyguard spoke for the couple : "Presumably you have the pull to give us licit access to what we've been attempting to do illicitly?"

Rusk nodded. "Ah sure can scare up a hadron collider, and after ya'll has squared away time owed me for springin' ya from the hoosegow, you can test your gal's computations to zap ya' back to your home dimension."

Another twosome peep, almost too quick for Rusk to be certain that it had even occurred, flashed across the space in between Awesome & Cobalt ; this time the verdant woman spoke.

"You've got yourself a scientist," She reseated her slim backside on Cobalt's lap. "And her very talented bodyguard!" She smooched whom she was describing.

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Schmidt recalled that Zoll<sup>3</sup> *was correct in his measurement of these two of his former inmates : they really are an interesting couple!* The more Schmidt observed them, the more interesting they became. They were oddly cross dressed not in their clothes but somehow in their very skins. It was less obvious in Cobalt : there were only little gestures that seemed out of place with an assured, almost feminine jungle cat grace : a recurrent and seemingly unconscious hand gesture suggestive of emory boards and fingernails, for one. Jade Awesome, on the other hand, while a very pretty mid-twenties woman, moved & gestured with the ingénue clumsiness of either a much younger female or she was what the Amerikaner's called a *tomboy*. Even with her choice of platform shoes, an odd choice given the racy red & panty free dress, the doctor somehow gave the impression of wearing wobbly heels. Whatever it was that they were, Schmidt found them as beguiling and entertaining in person as they appeared in their prison documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> A non-canonical off-the-board super-prison established originally by Hydra to pull promising criminals from super-max establishments such as the Raft, and Prison 42. It is an artificial islet which moves around the Vanuatu archipelago in the Pacific.

<sup>2</sup> Saxe is both a light blue tinged with grey, and a place in Germany.

<sup>3</sup> The ex-Hydra warden of the ex-Hydra Liberty Zero detention facility.

# Debriefed Dealings

## Chapter Summary

After the Washington meeting, Cobalt & Jade Awesome mate and collaborate.

From the exterior, there was nothing but the unruffled waters of the Washington Tidal Basin ; there was no indication of the presence of five out-of-phase floors of super-secret almost governmental organization, AEGIS, topped by fifteen of the single most exclusive hotel in the world, The Eidolon. Within the glass walls of its open concept penthouse suite the two people upon the bed were two busy with each other to take in the two hundred and forty two years of American triumph & tragedy twinkling below in the night shrouded expanse of the National Mall.

A glowing Jade collapsed her fluid bespattered firm form across Cobalt's supine sweatiness ; kissed him with full-on Friday Baldwin<sup>1</sup> precision . She broke the buss, a dewy spider thread filament of their intermingled spittle bridging the gap between their panting mouths.

“We grok<sup>2</sup> each other down to the DNA!”

Looking up into her green eyes, Cobalt looked distant for a space of time that could almost be measured only in picoseconds before he proved her fervid assertion with a circular thumb rub over the super erogenous green flesh at the very top of her natal cleft<sup>3</sup>; her body twitched against his, and she expelled a shivery little exhalation that puffed excitingly against his cheek.

“Yes, it's almost like I know your body better than I know my own.”

Jade squeezed his cheeks, kissed the ridiculously exaggerated pout.

“Almost!? I'm pretty sure that our trans-dimensional reality hop switched us!”

Cobalt shrugged as much as he could pinned to the wrecked bed by his sleek mad scientist significant other.

“Only pretty sure?”

"You know neither of us can remember much of our pre-jump selves."

Cobalt added a dash of pressure to his caress at the exciting intersect of Jade's back and butt ; he reached around with his other hand to fondle another one of Jade's whet spots, the back of her knees. The double sexy strike elicited a quavery gasp and an arched back which pressed her dewy nudity down upon the arousing blue rigidity of her lover.

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An entangled collection of sweaty limbs, the couple had a, for them, typically post coital conversation.

Nibbling on a coral nipple, Cobalt murmured, "That's what she wants to do with him!"

Jade, looking smug, hands behind his head, said, "Lie 'in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed...honeying and making love?' "2

Cobalt giggled, popped up to plant a kiss on her mouth.

"Verily, my sexy nerd!"

"So that's why she was acting so odd during the interview?"

Cobalt cocked an eyebrow : "That, and people tend to be thrown when you flash them, dirty girl!"

She grinned. "She sure was ; he, not one whit."

"Probably for the same reason why she isn't getting anywhere with him."

"He's more into power than sex?"

He rewarded her with a kiss. "And the stolen and spilled drinks?"

Her eyes widened in understanding.

"He's been stringing her along ; she's beginning to rebel!"

Cobalt nodded, stroked down into the firm green valley in between Jade's muscular buttocks. "You saw Rusk's reaction : he hid it quickly, but he was..."

She finished for him. "Annoyed."

"His proper little soldier is acting up."

Jade furrowed her brow ; at the other end clenched bottom pleasurably around questing fingers. "There's something else about her : there's something *odd* about her physical grace."

"So his executive assistant is a ballerina soldier. So what?"

"No, I mean she's far *too* elegant and graceful : she was..." She hunted for the correct word, "Spooky!"

"What does it mean?"

she frowned, prettily : "They're a complex couple."

"Like us?" He playfully swatted her bum.

“She wishes!”

Jade wriggled her hands in between their pressed together bodies ; grabbed his lengthening, thickening anatomy.

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In the tangle of love wrecked bed, the very toned and very green woman addressed her very blue, slightly less toned lover.

“So, what did you think of Rusk’s spiel?”

He ran a finely manicured fingertip in circles around an emerald nipple as he considered her question.

“It’s foolish to believe that we’ll get everything we want if we join Rusk’s secret task force. What did he call it?”

“AEGIS : AgEncy Guarding International Security.”

Cobalt laughed : “That sounds like an awfully defensive way to cover up...”

“...all sorts of skulduggery?” Jade giggled, not without a slight uneasy waver.

Cobalt hugged his woman hard. "Just until we can sneak our way back to the CERN 'collider.'"

“Is that so important?”

That stopped Cobalt. “I don’t honestly know : I like the ways things are now.”

Awesome nodded. “So do I, but” She gripped her lover, ardently. “Whatever our resources were there, here they’re...”

He finished the thought : "*Nonexistent* here. So, *no* choice?"

“What?” Jade drew her man in to a hug that was no longer sexual. “We’ll always have a choice! *Always!* For now let’s see how things go before we rethink *our* stance.” She was rewarded with that rarest experience of her lover : he cast off the armour of humour, and shivered in her grasp.

“I *really* don’t trust him!”

Jade stroked his jet hair. “I only trust *you!*”

He surged up tearfully against her ; she knew exactly how lucky she was to have him...or be him : their present quantum reality was complicated.

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<sup>1</sup> The protagonist of Robert A. Heinlein's novel *Friday* (1982) can, amongst other amazing things, convey precise emotional content with her kisses.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Heinlein's word from his novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* made it into the Oxford dictionary ; it's fading into obscurity. Jade devoured what this author refers to as the 'Dirty Old Uncle Heinlein Canon'--everything that isn't classified as his juveniles (1947-1953) while she was interred within the prison, *Liberty Zero*.

<sup>3</sup> The space where her butt crease begins is almost as horny a patch of skin as her official horny patch on almost exactly the far side of her pelvis. A little stroking there'll drive her over the Big O in very short order.

<sup>4</sup> A direct Hamlet quote. With apologies to the Prince of Denmark & the Bard.

# AEGIS of Consent

## Chapter Summary

AEGIS is a complicated arrangement of monsters run by a bigger monster.

In the most secretive change room Jade Awesome—it was deep underneath an invisible hotel—found herself contemplating a full body reflection of herself both fully encased and fully revealed within an outfit that was completely and totally ridiculous.

The nearly sprayed-on jumpsuit adhered a horizontal red & white striped pattern to just about every lithe detail of her body : AEGIS had been modest enough to provide her with a wee Brazilian anti camel-toe crotch guard. The glossy lab coat & half mask completed the gaudy pseudo American flag design with their blue fields spangled with white stars. On the right shoulder of both jumpsuit and coat were capital lambda inverted Vs : blue on the jumpsuit, and red on the overcoat.

She placed a metal-flake red gauntlet across her breast ; felt the papilla poke of braless breast ; solemnly giggled at her super-patriot stripper reflection. She intoned, 'I pledge allegiance to the Nippily Flag of this Most Horny Union!' Snorting, she kicked open the door with a red booted foot, tried her damndest not to awkwardly sashay in her Red White and very Blue costume down the hallway painted that shade of sickly green that seemed to be the official colour of all subterranean facilities ; failed spectacularly.

She paused outside the drab double doors of the conference room bearing the equally dull tacked on sign informing the reader that what lay inside was for, 'AEGIS field team personnel only!' ; assembled her features into a sardonic 'you want me to actually wear this?' expression ; saloon swept both doors open, and sexily stormed into the room.

The enormous conference room that she stormed into was decorated with a recurring device that had been painted over whatever organization had previously owned the room : a round gold shield bearing a red lambda ; bordering the symbol a ring of the flags of the G8 nations<sup>1</sup>. There had been a conversation in between two women, one lithe, olive skinned, raven tressed ; the other rotund with burnt umber skin, and a flaming red ponytail ; and a muscular, Nordic, buzz clipped man. The flag-jouncing, double door entrance stopped it cold.

Then, she saw ; she understood. Amongst the group of tactical vests and olive drab, broken only at the shoulder by the AEGIS sigil and various discreet national flags, only herself and Cobalt, decanting a coffee from a well stocked buffet table on the room's port side, were ridiculously body-flagged : his being, naturally given her's, an immodestly tight Canadian maple leaf.

The change in her demeanour was as awkward as it was striking. She stumbled forward a step as if tripping over the annoyance which had dropped away from her as she moved further into the room with her oddly beguiling ingenuous grace.

There were appreciative murmurs, and a wink from the attractive, high breasted epicene with an Italian shoulder patch who had been arguing something with an American buzzcut beefcake as Jade removed her partner's coffee from his grasp to replace it with herself. She exclaimed, "You've always been my favourite pleasure trip, Canada!"

Cobalt angled his down up to smilingly lock eyes with his slightly shorter partner.

"You're always welcome, America! Do you have anything to declare?"

She slipped her hands over his taut maple leaf ; breathed, "Manifest Destiny!"

Cobalt laughed, threw his hands up. "Canada surrenders!"

America rewarded Canada's capitulation with a full bodied clutch & kiss.

The other assembled members of AEGIS looked on the international amour with various expressions and demeanours : The strapping blue eyed blonde Walker stared at them with the unabashed scorn of the true believer.

Cobalt slipped his tongue across green seashell ear, whispered, "He's U.S. Agent : buff, brutal, boring." She took a closer look at the petite olive-skinned woman and noted dressed that the bulky, black tactical gear included a cod piece. Jade couldn't help but stare.

Cobalt quipped, "I see you've noticed Snapshot's..."

Jade couldn't help herself : "Piece!"

Sensing the green girl's gawk, the Mediterranean beauty twinkled dark eyes at them, and blew a flirty kiss ; Jade blushed very fetchingly. The twinkle turned into a grin, and the wearer started walking towards the flustered game.

"I could teach you how not to need a bodyguard." The voice fit the woman : quiet but with a smokey depth that made Jade think of the rumble of distant summer thunder. She felt Cobalt's hand settle protectively--or was it possessively--onto her shoulder ; she leant slightly out of it.

Jade parked her flustered arousal behind a facade of cool aplomb. She nodded at the other woman.

"Perhaps I'll take you up on that."

"You'll train under me sooner or later!"

Snapshot smouldered a final gaze at her ; again, Jade burned redly. "See you around!" Carmine Gallo flicked an impudent little salute at the bodyguard, headed back to her conversation with the sullen looking Walker.

From the buffet table, a pair of tiny golden eyes under a sodden shock of lapis lazuli hair peered out jealously at the flirting antics from over the inner edge of an enormous punch bowl. Three more nearly identical punch soaked heads joined the first in the spiteful stare.

The dark, voluptuous Brazilian shoulder patched woman browsing at the buffet table seemed content to consider the couple with no more than a glance, but what a look it was : sultry violet pupils flared over them.

A slightly pouty Cobalt saw her looking : "That's Firebrand : she's thermal." He did a double take.

"I swear that she was svelte when this shindig started!"

Then the conversation was derailed by the entrance of the chromium android with German flag skinned shoulders entered the conference room, and Jade Awesome had the answer to the other question that had been bothering her.

The impossible grace of the feminine movement appeared oddly more natural for the naked robot than it was when Jade had met it in it's human sheathe. Jade noticed that the shuttered irises at groin and breast suggested that the 'bot's earlier sexual frustration may have not been simulated.

Jade thought, 'Hello, Uncanny valley Blaze Tisiphone! Why're you so obviously robotic?'

She eyed the newest entry with what appeared to be cooler indifference than the rest if the room, her man included. She nudged him in the ribs ; he looked apologetic.

The android took up a position at the lectern at the head of the table ; addressed the assembled in an accent that matched its German body paint : "Since ve zeem to haff everybody present, I vill begin." The bright blue optical sensors registered the populated punchbowl ; the attached gleaming head swivelled in the direction of the possibly gynandrous woman in the Italian tactical gear and codpiece.

"Snapshot, please focus your *associate*."

Carmine Gallo cut a sardonic little bow, clipped a nose plug hanging from the collar of her outfit to her aquiline nose ; blew a theatrical kiss somehow scented with rose towards the hot tub punchbowl. The party of four pixies flew wetly from the bowl to whirr an dragonfly dance around the elfin assassin ; as the dance quickened, the individual tiny nudes blurred and flowed into each other until only one was left. A four foot vodka soddened sprite stood on tiptoes, delivered a kiss accented by a low moan of pleasure from the kissed. A sexy fragrance of strawberries drifted across the room provoking erections and wet labia. Everyone but Walker was appreciative : obviously erect, he frowned at the sultry display. Breaking the kiss, the composite fairy wheeled on Cobalt and Jade to deliver an impudent stuck out tongue and a very appropriate accompanying raspberry of lemony scent.

The android continued as if nothing odd had happened. "Velcome to AEGIS : AgEncy Guarding International Security."

“What's with Medusa?” That came quietly from the hard to sexually parse assassin holding her all too easily parsed paramour who also looked inquiringly at the bot.

“She’s a monster used for good.” Her red, black and yellow arm swept the room.”

Snapshot’s eyes narrowed. She came close to saying something that would have been deleterious to her position, but Cobalt butted in.

“And who’s Perseus?”

The assassin and her composite pixie traded an enigmatic look before sharing a pleasure darkened gaze at the Classically aware blue man. The faint scents of liquorice and orchids rippled across Cobalt's awareness, and suddenly he felt as if his arousal was strong enough to rip its way right out of his outfit . He squirmed against Jade; she, in turn, was enkindled by the basil musk and indecent bulge of his arousal.

“I am, if need be.” Dell Rusk strode into the room from behind the curtained stage at the room's bow. He was impressive in a George C. Scott Patton manner as he took the Medusa head decorated podium , but Jade was far too busy bussing her beau to notice.

Rusk was amused by the amount of sexual energy his horny cyborg lieutenant had managed to amass within the conference room ; was it intentional or merely an unintended side effect of Blesse's own frustrations.

The lovers broke their clasp, returned their attentions to the purpose to which the chamber had been laid.

Rusk gestured towards the android : "As frau Maschine mentioned, we will be the new vanguard of government policy regarding national and international security concerns."

Firebrand, through a mouthful of canapé, grouched, "You make it sound like the diplomatic corps!"

Rusk would have looked serious if it weren't for the vigour in his eyes.

"I didn't hire you to put out fires."

The dark haired woman smirked, scoffed another pastry.

Experiencing a disquieting mixture of arousal and discomfiture at the mass assemblage of hormones, charisma and mystery, Jade attempted to make her hold on Cobalt look less desperate than it felt. He noticed the extra element of pressure, accurately gauged it ; returned it with his own slightly overcharged squeeze.

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<sup>1</sup> Brazil, France, Germany, U.S.A., Japan, United Kingdom, Italy, Canada

# Fluid Dynamics

## Chapter Summary

Awesome and Cobalt get it on and shower it off. All euphemism filters are set to null :  
It's full-on NSFW content time.

Jade slid down the 7.62 centimetre width of cyan cock with the exact euphoria of a woman of Science. Underneath and within her, Cobalt was literally within the grip of a mind and body blowing paradox : he seemed to know the organ he was within more than the one his girlfriend was riding cowgirl. She did that little hip swirl on the upstroke that he knew meant she was close to bursting ; in response, at the apogee of her ascent, the only part of his fluid slicked penis still within her, the glans, throbbed with the muscular contraction that she knew signalled that she would finish him off with her next down thrust. She plunged.

They cried out in shared release ; Awesome arched her back, her jaunty breasts pushing emerald nipples towards the ceiling of their actual room in the Eidolon. Cobalt thrust his hips up to remain deep within the clenching warmth of his lover's vagina as he gushed within her. Gasping, he collapsed back onto the mattress, his come slicked cock twitching and still spurting splashes and splatters of come across Jade's thighs and the tangled wreckage of the bedclothes.

A laughing, sweaty Jade looked down at her lover. "I'm sure you're part," She grasped the still half erect, semen weeping cyan penis. "This part *especially*, horse!"

"*I am sagittarius.*"

She stuck a professorial index finger ceiling wards with the hand unburdened by impressive manhood ; launched into a characteristic Awesome Science! speech with, "You know I don't believe in astrology : It's hokum at best, intellect destroying at worst ; the sooner we do away with such arcane bunkum the sooner we'll reach a Golden Age of Science!"

He began to harden in her non gesturing hand. "I love it when you talk *science*!"

Jade added a trifle more pressure to her grasp of his swelling, lengthening organ as she raised an eyebrow. "Were you baiting me?"

Fully, impressively erect ; a pearl of luminous Cowper's fluid already welled up at the vertex of blue glans, Cobalt grinned : "With my Masters in baiting!"

Jade grimaced. "That *terrible* pun has earned you a real tongue-lashing!" Without breaking physical contact, she slid her sex-slicked body down over her lover's to ice cream cone-swirl her tongue around tip before skimming a glossy saliva trail down trembling shaft ; flick over

the tight, hairless bulge of testes. Cobalt stretched out, rested his hands behind his head ; groaned in ecstasy at the cogently carnal succour he was receiving.

\*\*\*\*

In the Eidolon's enormous glassed in shower the couple scrubbed each other clean of the residues and lacquers of sex. Cobalt squirted a generous amount of body wash onto a wetted loofah, proceeded to scrub his reproductive ejecta from Jade Awesome's toned green stomach. As he worked the cleansing implement in small, soapy circles, he conversed with his squeeze.

"So Rusk sure has amassed himself a randy raft of operatives, ourselves included!" He swirled a corner of the dried marrow fruit to dislodge a splotch of semen lodged within Jade's shapely navel.

"It isn't Rusk : it's his horny, sex deprived robot lieutenant." Jade flexed her washboard abs, her 'innie' popping to ease her man's work. "Did you notice that everyone but that asexual Walker and us are sexy in ways that aren't het?"

Having finished with the belly button, Cobalt popped it back in ; worked the sudsy loofah up the rest of the taut, come spattered six-pack.

"That seems true for the intersex assassin and her pixie swarm but what about thermal girl?"

Jade remembered the brief smouldering glance of the curvy woman : "I'm pretty sure Firebrand'd be a lesbian, if she could only find a Lady Asbestos."

Cobalt lathered Jade's athletic, upturned breasts. "Has she's gone out of her way to ensure that she has zero competition for the affections of Rusk?"

Jade wetted and lathered up her own loofah, and began working on Cobalt from the calves up. "If that's it, do you think that she has a chance?"

"I'm wondering what are *our* chances if the team's arranged from the id of a sex starved robot."

"Of getting it on with *Rusk*?"

Cobalt pinched the bridge of his cyan snout leaving a large dab of soapy froth which dribbled down and dripped off the tip of his aquiline nose.

"Of getting anywhere but back to jail...or worse."

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# Simulations & Revelations

## Chapter Summary

The team's first training session utilizing the potentially terrifying powers of the new character, Wargame. It reveals things about Sara Verve, Capt. Walker, and something of one of the enemies of Dell Rusk.

Dressed in his AEGIS jumpsuit, Dell Rusk entered the chamber that was an odd combination of gleaming operating room and opulent teen bedroom. He turned to the scrubs dressed woman leading the surgical team gathered about the medical equipment surrounding the room's oddly caged bed, and its unconscious, life support tubed and wired occupant.

He grinned happily : "Wakey-wakey eggs 'n bakey!"

Dr. Lilith Atman was used to her boss' eccentricities ; unlike her somewhat confused staff, she knew exactly what Dell meant by his hokey exclamation.

"Bring the patient up to threshold consciousness."

Rusk mused, After all of that *der blodsinn*<sup>1</sup> Hindu Shambala mysticism Nazi me had to put up with, I *finally* have an actually useful person from that entire subcontinent! He watched Atman's team work the equipment connected to the fluttering eyelids of the Kenyan teenager.

The dark eyes opened suddenly, focussed on Rusk with camera shutter speed. He waved the doctor away from the room. Once she was gone, he stepped over to the side of the bed, looked down at the strapped down, ventilator masked girl.

"It's a shame that you were too stubborn to do this willingly, Wargame!"

The girl raised her head off of the pillow, shouted through the fogged plastic of the respirator, "You kidnapped me?!"

He kept his expression grave : it was tough given the situation. "Nobody's been *kidnapped*, Kioni : thanks to the possible terrorist applications of that little secretive executive *Avernus tier in your Ely3ium MMO, you've been legally apprehended by my little corner of the State Department*.

The girl furrowed her brow, and shut her eyes in concentration .

"That *talent* of yours isn't going to work, honey chile." He tapped the iron mesh of the cage surrounding the bed. "This here Faraday cage blocks wi-fi."

She dropped her head resignedly back onto the pillow. "What do you..?"



"Do you have any idea how hard it is to train a super secret task force in the field without anyone being the wiser?" He held his arms as wide apart as he could.

"Enormously...*unless*...."

Kioni wryly finished, "You have a person who can personally simulate it all where ever you want."

Rusk's smile widened. "It's *almost* what you do best, Kioni! " He strolled over to the eighty inch flat screen on the wall opposite the foot of the bed, switched it on : a digital flurry of snow formed the title, *Operation : Precious Snowflake* "This includes all of the environmental and operational data you'll need to craft your show." He gestured to the screen. "It's cued to your voice."

"You have four hours." Rusk left with a cheery wave.

With a sigh, Kioni got to work. It did not take her long to become engrossed : the dossier was as fascinating as it was well produced. She felt the components of the overall simulation begin to slide neatly together within her growing mental structure. If she was to be a prisoner, at least the cage and the labour were first rate! She'd also use her gift to consider how to escape her imprisonment.

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The training facility was, for Dr. Awesome far more interesting than was the actual simulated training. It was a virtual reality system that sidestepped the traditional sensory input node of a VR helmet or electrode matrix to somehow inject the simulation data directly into the cerebral cortex without any manifest projector equipment. For a minute or two, the team had been standing within an empty rough-hewn limestone cavern far below the Eidolon hotel ; and the next, they were fully immersed into the chill wind and snow of a Soviet boreal forest. He was still considering it when Cobalt plucked her out of the way of a spray of Spetsnaz SR-3MP tracer<sup>2</sup> fire.

Knowing his woman, he admonished her with, "Doc, stop thinking about the X Box, and start playing its game!"

A bullet whined off of the left shoulder of Cobalt's remarkably armoured Maple Leaf suit ; he felt the grazing impact. Spectral metadata fluoresced briefly over his stricken shoulder, 'Graze : agent integrity 98%.'

Leading with his shield, deflecting a stream of automatic rifle labeled by an increasingly growing percentage of ghostly simulation analysis, team leader Walker deflected the phoney fire of a highly trained virtual commando unit hidden amongst the snow laden pine trees to the front of his team. He issued orders to his unit.

"Firebrand, lay down defensive fire to our flanks and rear ; then support Snapshot. Snapshot, deploy 'Ring to our hot target, and snipe hostiles! Cobalt, if we loose *Boffin*<sup>2</sup> we've lost the mission!"

A chorus of terse acknowledgments crowded the command channel ; the orders were executed. Walker formed up with Cobalt to shield Maven. A chunky Firebrand lit the tip of her left middle finger, exhaled her flammable breath ; cast a walking flamethrower stream of fire over the boreal forest ; soon a wall of fire, designated 'Environmental Manipulation : Defensive +30', blazed to the sides and rear of the AEGIS unit.

Snapshot cast a scent of anise at the squadron of five lapis lazuli haired pixies hovering around her more than usually armoured form—her signature codpiece hidden under more winterized gear—and they, melting into the environment, darted forward to mark their targets. Snapshot, reading the complex sensory returns of Fairy Ring's intelligence, drew her twin mini sniper rifles from their sheathes across her back ; began her unique brand of balletic sniping, each and every shot punctuated with a luminous trail of multiple 'Kill Shot' messages with a mounting tally ghosted in her acrobatic wake.

The firewall completed, a slightly less fleshy Verve lit up her body ; strode into a bullet stream which was designated 'Threat Zero' as bullets flared into sublimated gas before they could touch her blazing body. Laughing, she ran into a platoon of panicked soldiers ; began immolating screaming Russians with her flaming hands. Her attendant simulation information 'Kill Count' began to catch fire.

The intelligence, computer or otherwise, running the simulation awarded the victory to AEGIS : over the battlefield, giant crimson letters spelled out, 'Crushing Victory!'. Enemy gunfire slowed and halted as the remaining Russian force attempted to disengage and escape.

A frowning, skinny Firebrand said something in Spanish : ¡La próxima vez tengo que quemar más que solo árboles! ¿Entender?"

Walker's return smile was as wintry as Verve's scowl was sultry : “You'll have the entire base to burn down..."

“And personnel!”

“With *one* exception.”

“Si, we *need* her!”

Walker threw her a silver wrapped package.

“Good : now fuel up, Firebrand!”

She tore the bar open, took a bite of the moulded food stuff ; moused : “Does it have to taste like mierda de mula?”

Walker ignored her.

“Form up, people, we've got another five K's and a rogue genetics lab to blow!”

Jade whispered to Cobalt, “Walker's okay with Firebrand being a psycho?”

Cobalt whispered back, “What worries me is that maybe he's a bigger one!”

\*\*\*\*

From the treeline thirty meters distant, Walker assayed the target and its defences with binoculars. The facility was a fortress : a concrete bunker surrounded by razor wire, machine gun equipped emplacements and two orbiting helicopter gunships.

"We're going to lie low, and hit them at zero two hundred."

Cobalt observed, "That's fourteen hours from now : won't that be time for them to get help?"

Walker smiled grimly. "This place is so far off the map that it'd take half a year and three *Pinko* oversight committees to even find out that it even *exists*!"

Both Cobalt and Jade noted the interesting term Walker had used to label the Russians : What's that going to tell me about you, bossman, once we get back to the real world? Jade wondered.

"We can take our time and wait for them to get tired, get sloppy. Get comfortable, except you, Boffin : you're on first watch. Wake 'Brand at fifteen hundred : Jade, eighteen hundred ; 'Shot, twenty one hundred, and I'll sit the final."

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Underneath giant floating message, *Imminent Kill*, The helicopter pinwheeled licks of flame and fragments of disintegrating rotor blades into the night sky. A flaming, laughing comet, Firebrand roared around for a second pass at the Russian machines. The second chopper in the formation labeled, *Evade : successful*, tried to veer away from its stricken companion, but Walker, swearing at his team member's antics, expertly threw his shield into its tail blades ; the chopper's message changed to, *Evade : unsuccessful* as shorn blades flew into the air, and the whirlybird whirled into its fully ablaze twin. Both machines exploded, and plunged to earth in a cascade of burning fuel, debris and firecracker bursts of detonating munitions. Above the wreckage, lettering flared, Ki...

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Adding a shot of energy drink to her third coffee, Kioni thought, That was too cool! Time to give them the fun meta data! She inserted a new set of messages into her conceptual render of her cognitive simulation.

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The lettering faded to be replaced by the far fancier message, *Excessive Style Bonus*!

A rocket pod attached to a crumpled pylon flared six contrails towards the entrance of the fortified compound ; the resultant eruptions of flame and flying debris destroyed the gate, the guard towers and opened up a fire singed hole in the front of the bunker.

Walker watched the unfolding event with a scowl ; Cobalt whooped, "This game *rocks*!"

Jade looked thoughtful, "It all seems rather demonstrative for a com..."

Snapshot squeezed in between them, threw her arms about their shoulders ; suggestively exclaimed, “I can’t wait to see how you two *handle* yourselves in there!” There was a heady rush of jasmine, and suddenly Cobalt and Jade both had two sulky little nude shoulder angels.

An irate Walker saved the couple from the bizarre fey come-on : “Keep it in your pants, ’Shot!”

Shrugging, Snapshot trailed her fingers down two shoulders as she stepped back. She exhaled liquorice scent, and the composite members of Fairy Ring looked quite happy as they winged back to hover over Snapshot.

A very skinny Firebrand touched down in a fire lit fog of sublimating snow.

Walker glared at her : “That was stupidly *wasteful*, Firebrand!”

Emerging from the hissing vapour, Sara Verve shrugged : “It’s *only* a game, gringo. I have all of the shit-bar body-refills in the world.”

Walker pointed a blunt index finger at her. “And in the real world?”

She shrugged almost skeletal shoulders as she caught the thrown foil wrapped package ; tore it open with tobacco stained teeth, and wolfed down the brown slab of cultured ultra-protein. As she walked back into the treeline to join the others, Verve did not see Walker's grim smile.

As he re-raised his night vision binoculars to study the smouldering installation, he muttered, “You’re *my* not too smart bomb, Verve.”

“That looks far too inviting. Snapshot, I want *all* Tink eyes in!” Walker gestured his optical device towards the flame licked hole in the bunker.

Snapshot sketched an impudent salute, and summoned the component members of Fairy Ring for a sexy little impromptu briefing : a little fairy-french kiss for each of the five pixies imparted the scent coding necessary for the four foot tall fey to understand their instructions.

Walker scowled but he did not interrupt the antics. With the final kiss just as Walker was about to comment, a meta message flashed a pink thumping hearted ‘Kiss & Kill : +10% bonus, all actions’ above Snapshot and her pixie squad. Jade grabbed Cobalt, smooched him with extra vigilance ; was rewarded : ’French bonus : +15 swelled hearts over her and her breathy man.

“How ‘bout it, gringo?” Leering, Verve puckered her lips at Walker.

Walker gritted his teeth ; it almost looked like he was smiling.

The quartet of pixies zipped towards the breach in the bunker, glammers blurring their bodies into the snowy night.

Snapshot felt the odd sensation of receiving four subtlety different sensory inputs of the essentially single entity that she alone knew as *Nyxsa* and everyone else called either the Tinker Belles or Fairy Ring.

“It’s odd : power’s off.” She talked with the weirdly dissociated voice of a person stretched across, counting herself, six points of view.

Walker rubbed his chin. “Unless they keep their generat...Snapshot, pull them out!”

The air was suddenly filled with a loud klaxons and a giant black exclamation point outlined in yellow and red banding formed above the bunker.

Looking shocked, Cobalt yelled, “What the...”

Four frantic fairies fled from the bunker to form up behind their mistress into their wide eyed, clingy five foot nude focussed form just as the front of the bunker exploded in a storm of flying rebar-veined chunks of concrete. Twin steel doors the size of battle tanks whirled overhead in a frisbee flightpath that shaved a long furrow in the forrest behind the team. Everyone but Firebrand reflexively dropped to the snowy ground as the doors roared overhead with the sound of flying locomotives : hands raised to the sky, a nearly skeletal Verve laughed wildly.

Twin red beams of light stabbed out of the darkness at them ; and Cobalt, picking himself up out of the snow, exclaimed, “Boss fight!”

\*\*\*\*

In the faraday caged control room, Blaze gave her boss a disbelieving look as the giant, red spotlit eyed cyborg tiger polar bear chimera leapt out of the ruined Soviet base ; Schmidt registered her expression with a complex feeling of prideful regret : soon she’s going to get to big for her britches. He grinned at his internalized Americanism.

“Why not?” He winked at his alpha underling : “Do *you* know what the Soviets are really science-screwing around with for real?”

“But endangered animal super weapons? Wargame’s the one *screwing* with us!”

Humming the chorus to *Eye in the Sky*<sup>3</sup>, Schmidt keyed the microphone to the room occupied by the teenager known as Wargame.

“That’s excellent, Kioni, sugah plum! I knew you'd take to this like a sow to slop!”

\*\*\*\*

The mission debrief was in the same room as the meet & greet ; minus the buffet, and the AEGIS logos now looked as if they weren’t hastily designed arched over an older owner. The team sat around a table in the room’s centre. A single chair commanding the stage end of the table remained unfilled.

Carmine Gallo bent her chair back and laughed.

“I almost felt guilty putting down that double-endangered circus freak!”

Jade Awesome added, “The only thing that could have made that thing more of a guilty kill would have been if it had some baby seal eyes baked into it!”

Dr. Cobalt cum Maven was trying hard not to stare at the separate, tiny Tinker Belles which Gallo gently brushed away when they came a little too close to a part of her physique just a little too erogenous for the briefing, or the literal debriefing room if the filthy minded component atomies of Fairy Ring had their—her?—way! One nuzzled at a stiff nipple poking an exciting little pout in the white wife beater that Carmine wore after having removed her bulky winter gear and tactical vest. One settled for nibbling at Gallo’s left earlobe : an action earning the breathy toleration of her mistress. The other three wrestled the codpiece away before Gallo could dislodge them ; they giggly-spearmint-scented flew away with their booty ; the extra-dimensional couple were treated to the impressive and unmistakable bulge in Snapshot’s tighty whitey briefs. Gallo shrugged at the obviously put out Walker.

“You know what the ‘Belles are like : they’re almost as dirty as Verve!”

Back to her comfortable level of fat, fleshy Verve shot Gallo a flaming phoenix version of the middle finger.

“Cojo con fuego, chica polla!”

Smiling, Gallo returned the gesture albeit without the extra bit of fire.

“Penicillin will fix that burn, bitch!”

Walker was about to intercede in the general cattiness when he was saved the trouble by the arrival of the bossman and his alpha minion.

Rusk, resplendent in his AEGIS shoulder patched uniform, strode into the room ; the gleaming ‘nude’, save for her German flagged shoulder decal and sexual characteristic iris apertures, frau Maschine accompanied him with an armful of hard print materials.

Rusk smiled that smile that made Jade Awesome think of a cat that had eaten a choice canary.

“That was fine as a frog’s hair split four ways, people!”

Cobalt raised a perplexed eyebrow : “Thanks?”

Gently plucking the squirming, lemon fuming pixie from her earlobe, Carmine chuckled, “That’s our boss, dropping compliments from so far south of the Mason-Dixon line that’d confuse most Southerners!”

The grin expanded to a feline that had feasted on a flock of yellow birds.

“You can’t get any more Southern than me, Sug!”

Frau Maschine thought, *Ja, Bavaria!*

Rusk turned to the silent teutonic Walker.

“Agent, I know you find your team *bohemian*, but you did well!” He turned his happy glance to the rest of the team : “You *all* did! Now read up : there’s some new intel, and I want my boys and gals to be able to scent out all the skunks when I send y’all out on the actual hunt!”

At her cue, frau Maschine started handing out her materials.

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<sup>1</sup> German : the nonsense.

<sup>2</sup>Russian special forces armed with automatic rifles. The tracer rounds (roman candle ammunition used as an aiming aid for the actual bullets) are an artificial training addition.

<sup>2</sup>Not Cobalt’s official team designation (It’s Maven) : Walker’s an *asshole*.

<sup>3</sup>A 1982 song by The Alan Parsons Project.

# Snow Job

## Chapter Summary

The *actual* Russian mission

"Wargame sure called that part of the mission."

The five foot nothing Snapshot slung her part carbine & part sniper rifles across her back ; and, with free hands, cupped the bare buttocks of her clingy three-fourths of Fairy Ring : the remaining one-fourth was high above the tree tops in a perimeter sentry orbit. The lesser part could only feel the ghost of the greater part's shivery pleasure, and she pouted at not being part of the direct grope. She signalled her displeasure with a scent foot-stomp of ginger across the noseline<sup>1</sup> with her adored Mediterranean mistress--although a tiny bit less than usual at the moment.

Walker surveyed the rapidly dying flames and the bodies of the Spetsnaz squad : some were gunned down ; some were scorched ; some were smashed : all were very dead.

"So far, but don't get complacent, Snap' : there's no telling what's up ahead." He thought, it's hard, *mein Chef* to rely upon the word of a *fargige frau*<sup>2</sup> for mission intell, but I will try!

There was only the slightest sign of bristling under the camouflage of Carmine's return smirk, and snide, "I'll keep an eye out for you too, *boss*."

Munching on the first of her energy-restorative protein bars, a literally flushed Firebrand was too busy restoring herself to her comfortably corpulent corporality to inject anything more than a clotted laugh projecting a shotgun spray of spittle infused with particles of ultra-protein bar.

Jade kept glued to her man, and communicated her almost perfectly disguised unease with a quick clasp and look into her lover's eyes ; he reciprocated with a pained gaze which far outweighed his visible shrug.

Walker gave Gallo a humourless gaze before returning to business. "What's the word from our eye in the sky?"

Carmine's body language subtly altered from slight slouch of insolence to a more erect and professional stance ; her hands left their rump roost ; the uncomplete Tinker-Belle<sup>3</sup> collective assumed its disconnected and distant component's pout.

"All clear : zero air contacts, and zero *visible* ground."

Walker nodded. "Gu...good : retrieve & disseminate : standard recon pattern."



The scent that leaked from Carmine's nose gear smelt like chives and dill with odd hints of tobacco and leather : the tow-headed three foot fairy came eerily unglued into three one foot replicas of the larger whole just as the fourth copy whirred back to join the rest of her separate smaller forms vanishing into the forest ahead of the rest of the team.

"We've got exactly ten hours to make it to the base, execute extract/destruct orders, and rendezvous with egress assets : move it out!"

Walker led them forward towards whatever it was that ARK<sup>4</sup> was up to with a disappeared Ukrainian geneticist and the supposed core of the Tunguska event meteoroid.

\*\*\*\*

The dark green Ilyushin Il-112 transport clawed through the buffeting winds of the winter storm high above the snowbound taiga. At the controls, the chromium Blaze Tisephone fought the bucking control yoke as she spoke into her comms headset.

"Полет российского ВВС Ромео Эхо Дельта 251, запрашивающий транзитный воздушный коридор Стикс." (Translation : Russian Air Force flight 251 requesting transit air corridor Styx.)

She received the laconic, "Полет 251, код?" (Flight, code?)

A telltale flashed on her digital cockpit array, and a ominous tone sounded. Blaze thought, This is where we discover the strength of our intel as she responded as if being pulsed by the targeting radar of at least one surface-to-air missile battery was a ho-hum part of her regular day.

"Код: Всемогущий." (Code : Almighty) There was a pause, and Blaze would have sweated if she wasn't in complete control of the biological aspects of her cybernetics.

The telltale darkened ; the burr silenced.

The uninflected voice—she pictured it as belonging to a black box extension of the radar installation—droned, "Рейс 251, нулевые отклонения или ...." (Flight, zero deviations or....)

"понимать." (Understood)

The transport penetrated into Russian airspace, and Blaze said out loud in her still awkward English, "That was as easy as eating the pie!" She flipped the safety cage up on the squat black box hastily affixed to the top of her instrument panel, and flicked the red toggle : a luminous green digital countdown lit on the cockpit instrument panel ; began to spool down from a thirty minute starting point.

\*\*\*\*

Firebrand scowled without even the remotest sign of humour, vindictive or otherwise.

"Where in the *maldito inferno* is it?" The snow about her began to melt and sublime as her body temperature rose.

The clearing was the same as in the simulation with one exception : there was no bunker or installation. The team stood on the edge of the snow heaped tree line and stared at a whole lot of nothing in the glittering stillness of a full-moon night.

Carmine Gallo shrugged with catlike grace : "Looks like bad intel." She purposefully brushed by the couple behind her as she began to make off into the direction of the extraction point. Carmine exhaled Fairy Ring's recall scent while flirtatiously quipping, "We'll have lots of time to..."

Walker swept the field with his night vision goggles. "Shut up! Maven's right : *Something's* weird about this place." He turned his head to address Snapshot : "What's your Tink seeing?"

Over her shoulder, just as her tiny associates rejoined her, Gallo said, "*Exactly* what you are : a pretty, wintry picture."

"Land one of *her* where the facility *should* be."

Hands on her hips, Carmine Gallo said, "Why? There's zero there."

Walker's face began turning a dangerous red, a tic pulled at the corner of a tightly compressed scowl. Sara Verve smiled nastily, a little tidal surge of flame roiled across her renewed plumpness. Cobalt recognized the danger, and intervened with the coolly observed, "Then there's also zero problem with doing it, Snapshot."

Maven redirected the studied calm of his cyan face at the almost apoplectic U.S. Agent. Behind the seeming sang droid was his inner fear of being marooned or murdered in the middle of a winter wilderness by a cadre of psychotics. He further boosted his position with, "I don't think Rusk *commissioned* you to blow your stack during the very first mission." There was something about his relationship with Rusk which he had noticed the handful of times the older man was with the group. Walker had been oddly deferential to the older man, almost like they were master and apprentice. The observation paid off. Walker fought his anger down.

Oblivious to the near blow up, Jade was off to the side engrossed in her own binocular study of the snowy field.

Cobalt/Maven recognized the scientific ardour which tinged the voice of his oft-times annoying girlfriend mad scientist. "There's something odd..."

Verve quipped, "Maybe we should make Cobalt boss."

*Fuck!*, Cobalt thought. *She's going to burn everything down!* Out loud, and still as calm as a summer day, Cobalt lifted his goggles to consider the others with a level look.

"We all stand to get out of this alive if we stick to our *actual* roles, right Walker?"

Walker pulled his parka hood back, ran a steadying hand through his close-cropped blonde hair.

"One last look, people ; *then* dustoff. Snapshot, deploy *Tink*."

Gallo gave Shego<sup>5</sup> a sultry look as she scented Fairy Ring to detach one of her composite forms to wing its way back to the glade ; a shiver that was no longer potentially pleasurable, as it had been when they had first met all of those months ago at the AEGIS mixer, ran the length of her spinal column.

Binoculars trained on the glade, Cobalt remarked, "There's something not right about that snow field, but I..." A gust of wind blew across the area and, just as the Fairy Ring component fluttered to the ground, he had almost figured it out. "There's no particle scatter..."

Snapshot's eyes widened, a trace of something like lemon and tar scents seeping from around her nose-plug.

Both Cobalt and Gallo shouted at the same time, "It isn't snow!"

Four concrete turrets topped with an icing of wintry camouflage snapped up from the corners of a square hectare of fake snow. Black muzzles began to train on the intruder.

Walker snapped an order to Firebrand. "Take the turrets out!"

Gallo had already given the order to her far flung fairy ; she watched anxiously as the tiny dot of the pixie took flight just as the landing spot was engulfed in a storm of explosive flame and smoke. The panicky stink of onion and burnt toast caused her to feel some relief that one fourth of her girlfriend hadn't been blown out of existence ; then the form of the fairy zipped into view.

Laughing, Sara Verve leapt into the air ; her body exploding into a fiery, suddenly slimmer mass which blazed a heat shimmering trail towards the nearest of the four weapon emplacements. Guns swerved towards the new threat, but not before the fiery woman melted the barrels with a flame thrower jet issued showily from her mouth as she arced a meteoric tail past the tower. The other turrets ranged in on her ; an ineffectual burst of munitions flamed prematurely around the still yet skinnier female airborne blaze.

As the fourth tower joined the others in smoking ruin, Jade standing by her man, unhappily observed, "Now for the horrific boss fight!" As if to prove the aptness of her observation, the entire bulk of the camouflaged bunker began to rise from the snowy ground with a grinding roar of machinery to reveal a hangar sized portal.

Before anyone could react, the two halves of the enormous door sprung open to reveal the diminutive silhouette of a sole figure backlit by brilliant white light.

\*\*\*\*

Nine thousand kilometres removed from Siberia, Kioni, her raven tresses draped over the back of her brand new ground effect wheelchair--the old wheeled one was in a far corner of the gamer's paradise gilded cage--startled out of her focus upon a multi screened computer workstation. She considered the small transducer/ transmitter which connected her senses to a satellite system which was really no more elaborate than a collection of rocket assisted parabolic EM mirrors ; at that moment an energy signature reflected across the system which was much closer to Rusk's estimate than she thought possible. She considered the

chronograph at the top right of her central screen : 23:00 ; hoped her instructions to inform Rusk immediately would wake him ; was disappointed when he responded instantly, in person, immaculately groomed & neatly uniformed.

The girl smiled wryly.

"I was hoping to wake you, but vampires don't need sleep, do they, *Count?*"

There was a quality to Rusk's return grin which flash froze frost in her soul ; she shuddered, and his laugh rang with an iron mirth.

"Right idea ; wrong monster, honeychile!<sup>6</sup>" He leaned against the outside of the Faraday cage ; in a conspiratorial stage whisper, he added in his actual accent, "And my proper title is *der Graf*<sup>7</sup>!" He straightened, gave his jacket a tug ; continued with his Rusk twang, "I'm supposing that you've received one of the three signatures I provided you with?"

The trapped teen nervously nodded. "Not exactly the *Janus* one, but near enough that I thought you should know."

"What is the variance?"

"The empathy quotient is lower."

"Lower?" He thought, *Mein gott*, Kleiser was almost as sociopathic as Heydrich! How more mad would he be after seventy years!

"Is there anything else?"

"Nein!" She looked startled at her use of German."

"Wunderbar!" It sounded extra strange delivered with Rusk's Southern drawl. "Continue monitoring ; inform me of *any* changes."

\*\*\*\*\*

<sup>1</sup> The nose-plug assembly through which Snapshot can aroma-converse with her composite lover/drone, Fairy Ring.

<sup>2</sup> German : Black woman. It appears that the All-American Walker may be more than a little alt-right.

<sup>3</sup> An alternate, more jokey name for Fairy Ring.

<sup>4</sup> Augmentation Research Kontingent : ARK is a secret extension of the Institute for Biological Instrumentation of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Whim\_Wham is anchoring the difficult execution of the body swapped Disney duo, Shogo & Dr. D ; Shogo's mind & power set are in him, and his mad science, and zaniness are in her. As a result of their CERN, Large Hadron Collider transcription

to this reality, they are unaware of this beyond their extra spooky levels of comprehension of each other : physiologically, they're a randy early thirties couple ; psychologically, they're old shared souls.

<sup>6</sup> 1) A term of endearment. 2) The full first name of Honey Ryder, the Bond Girl of Dr. No.

<sup>7</sup> Der Graf (German) The count or earl. (Google Translate)

# Base Ambitions

## Chapter Summary

All they need to win is determination, guts and a whole lot of brains.

The silhouette resolved into a svelte grandmotherly woman with a tight bun of steel hair and a grin that was much less grandma than it was Big Bad Wolf.

With a cigarette roughened Russian accent, the grinning grandma sweetly asked, “Did you come all this way to rescue little old me?”

An incredulous Walker took a step forward.

“Veronika Sokolov’s in her mid thirties ; you’re three decades older : explain!”

The arctic, perfect enamel of the smile was uncanny within the fleshy fissures of the aged face.

“Beauty & youth are of little consequence when one can trade them for...” She splayed her arms and fingers above her head, shut her cloudy blue eyes ; her bare feet crunched through the ice encrusted snow as if she suddenly grew in weight.

“...absolute POWER!”

A sudden tiredness broke out over every member of the team ; they all staggered at exactly the same moment as the entirety of the actual snow in the glade sublimated and a portion of the distant tree line instantly withered.

Walker, ashen faced, shouted, “Take her down!”

Already skinner than she should have been, Firebrand flared ; screamed in agony as her fire streamed towards and wraith around the madly laughing figure of the upraised armed woman. An emaciated near skeleton fell hissing onto suddenly very dead and dry Siberian soil. Walker shouted, “You can suck fire; can you...? He snapped up his rifle ; commanded, “Gallo!”

Gallo smiled, scented her companion to drop down. “Eat bullets, bitch!” She blazed both carbines in a rattling snarl which combined with the deeper roar of Walker’s ACR<sup>1</sup> The target spread her arms wide ; bullets melted midair before her in a sudden scintillating shimmer of intense heat.

Walker evaluated the situation ; cried out, "Evade!"

Ancient Sokolov's laughter reaching a crescendo, the female figure, only half seen under a swirl of vapour and flame, lowered her hands towards the team ; an impossible gout of flame and ice flared out ; Snapshot and Fairy Ring avoided it : the supernaturally elevated human with her combat ballet ; her innately supernatural partner with the perfect aerial mirror of her earthbound lover's dance accented by the sharp, mocking laughter-scent of raspberries & lemons.

Cobalt pushed a fascinated Jade out of the path of destruction. She had been in the middle of a scientific rhapsody about something or other to do with 'total conversion' & ambient energies as the shove garbled it into an inarticulate shout as she tumbled into deep snow banked against a half buried fir tree. Before he could successfully evade the blazing, freezing blast, Cobalt was grazed by the flaring, freezing edge of the blast. His hardened skin was only slightly burned and frostbitten at the very same time.

Walker took it on his shield, cold & radiant and raw energies blasting off of the Vibranium to surround him in a brilliant cometary tail. Ironically, the shrivelled form of Firebrand escaped death as her body recouped enough of its stolen radiant energy to escape the frigid oblivion of hypothermia.

Their attacker cackled, "Ist das deine erbärmliche Kommandokraft, Johann?"<sup>2</sup> The shrouded figure looked up ; exclaimed, "And one other, I see!" Her right hand shot skywards, a bolt a energy, visible only for the shimmer of its heat, seared high into the sky.

*German?* Walker thought, *And Johann? We've waltzed into a trap!*

\*\*\*\*

The collection of satellites relayed the signal even as they soundlessly detonated ; within her electromagnetic cage, Wargame caught the residual energy, and amidst the sparks of the burned out transducer above her head, Kioni screamed, "It's not..." before slumping in her wheelchair, unconscious. Schmidt swore, "Scheisse!" He called out, "Comms : crash cart! Wargame is down!" The answer, immediate, sounded from hidden speakers in the ceiling : "Inbound, boss!"

Rusk removed a satellite phone from the inside pocket of his uniform jacket, synced it to a specific asset ; spoke two laconic code phrases to the device's transcription protocol ; sent it in pursuit of the ersatz Soviet cargo plane which should be exactly on rendezvous with the team...excepting complications, of course.

\*\*\*\*

The instructions of the Russian air traffic controller continued to drone in Maschine's aural circuit even as his actual intent steadily & stealthily closed in on the Cold War B-52 bomber disguised as a Russian Antonov An-225. The airburst caught Blesse off guard. The first manifestation was a brilliant flare of light which lit the sky as if the sun had suddenly decided to inhabit the space directly behind the aircraft.

A micro-second later, her internal radiation sensors triggered at exactly the same time as the aircraft's as a wave of high energy neutrons and other particles washed over them ; sparks

and flashing warning lights reflected off of her polished metal skin. The wallop of the shockwave rocked the airframe ; every light and klaxon that hadn't already sounded now blared and flared throughout the cockpit. Schmidt's signal lit up the repeater screen on the instrument panel in the midst of the chaos.

The cyborg life-extension of Johann Schmidt's righthand aide-de-camp expressed, through her gritted perfectly false-enameled teeth, "Doppelter russischer Mutterficker!"<sup>3</sup> followed immediately by, as she noticed her newest instructions, "Gott, Boss!" as, with one hand on the spasming yoke, and the other busily toggling switches and resetting fuses across the complex array of cockpit controls, she wrestled the steeply diving plane into a level flight path just before her personal wreckage would have become very difficult to differentiate from the polished aluminum and steel aircraft debris which would have been strewn across an island flecked lake with a stunted copse of wind gnarled pines.

\*\*\*\*

The second abrupt sun to the southeast threw a mad set of second shadows across the scene as the squad warily encircled Sokolov. Walker effortlessly carried the emaciated but still alive Sara Verve. In accented English, she crone crowed, "That is the light of your evaporated escape, fools!"

She raised her hands above her head, and another wave of tiredness swept across the team members ; naked rock under their feet cracked and heaved, and molten rock seeped, hissing to the surface to instantly harden to shock quartz laden basalt. She lowered her arms like the cannons of a battleship, and cackled ; before she could finish off the staggered team, a partially slagged enormous aircraft roared past scant meters above the treetops.

Surprised at being carried by Walker, Firebrand raised her head ; shouted at the enemy, "¿Quién es el tonto ahora, eh, maldito parásito?"<sup>4</sup>

Her head drooped to her depleted breast ; all she could manage was a husky whisper aimed at her unlikely protector, "Why didn't you let me rot?"

Keeping one eye on the foe and the other on the circling team, Walker almost conversationally responded with, "No one but me gets to kill you."

Verve's smile was oddly gentle as she barely managed to breathe, "Bastardo!" before she started to loose unconsciousness. Walker smacked her across the face ; shouted, "No easy out for you, soldier!" He dug a fuel bar out of Verve's outfit ; shoved it into her mouth. Almost reflexively, the gaunt woman chewed, swallowed ; lifted her head weakly ; swore, while smiling, "Pendejo, no me muero!"<sup>5</sup>

A small part of his mind that wasn't caught up intently in his immediate crisis wondered, *Why did I save her? She's super vulnerable to whatever this attack is ; it might be my only chance to rid myself of a major future problem. What am I doing?* Out loud, he replied, " Todavía no estoy listo para matarte!"<sup>6</sup>

Before she could fabricate a wiseass retort, the giant transport had arced about ; roared back overhead, its wings canted vertically ; the downward thrust of eight Stark Industries modified



Pratt & Whitney YJ57-P-3 turbojets eradicated the world in a swirling screaming storm of sound.

Her grey hair blowing around her head like Medusa, the crone redirected her hands towards the hovering target. Before she could act, the plane's bomb bay snapped open to eject a blazing jet powered formation of armoured that encased her within a geometric cell the external surface of which immediately fumed with liquid nitrogen vapour.

A pile of snow lurched out into the open, resolved into the goggles and parka which bulked out the otherwise lithe green Jade Awesome. She clumsily ran over to the containment housing ; ran a bulky mitten down the mist emitting metal.

"That was amazing! We're here to collect her, right?"

Walker nodded. "And the Tunguska core, if we can find it."

\*\*\*\*

"Where's Sokolov?" Walker mirrored in the shapely chromium of the speaker, pointed at the pilfered Stark-tech Hulk containment system wafting streamers of super-cooled air.

Frowning, the cyborg said, "How can Sokolov also be *Janus*?"

*Who the what now?* Jade thought. *Something's going off the rails for Team Rusk! Blaze-bot sure looks pissed!* Out loud she commented, "Let's figure that out *after* we're airborne : I'm sure we barely have time to finish here before our Russian friends show up with all of the reinforcements."

Both bot & boss considered The green woman with a look she could best define as annoyed acceptance ; Walker spoke first, issuing orders : "Snapshot, prep the demo charges ; Jade, Cobalt ; we're going in. Rest of you," He looked at the still very underfed Firebrand. "You've got overwatch, Verve : keep us safe! Maschine, keep the bird hot!"

Sara considered him with what would have been a relatively polite smile if it weren't for the fact that she was systematically wolfing down her remaining supplies of recharge bars. It was uncanny watching as the sharp angles of her body began to visibly fill in with body fat.

The German android pointed a chromium index finger at Walker. "Und don't overstay your welcome!" She cocked her head, and the index finger pointed up palm outwards with the rest of the metallic fingers. "Phase one, success : acquisition of Prime & possible Secondary. Proceeding to Phase Two. "Mein Gott! Will inform Lead. Out."

Maschine considered Walker with her uncannily human blue eyes. "Wargame's down: Solokov got her with some sort of energy feedback."

A somewhat less skeletal Verve exclaimed, " ¡Ahí va nuestra falsa cobertura satelital falsa! ¡Hora de pagar la fianza!" (Trans: There goes our fucking fake satellite coverage! Time to Bail!)

Walker glared at the fire projector. "It changes nothing, 'Brand!'" He addressed the robot : "Loft a drone perimeter : how much forewarning can you give me?"

The mechanical woman nodded, behind her eight thin plumes of smoke erupted from the fuselage of the aircraft ; arrowed away towards different cardinal compass points. "That'll be good for up to no more than ten to fifteen minutes, boss."

"That's all we'll need."

Verve did not look happy."

\*\*\*\*

Past the hanger doors the quartet found themselves within an enormous airlock with a dual inner door assembly : a person sized one dead centre of one the same size as the entry. Cobalt extracted a small kit from the only place he had storage, the exterior tops of his gloss blue boots, and stated, matter of factly, "I'm the security buster." He prized open the panel with nothing but a sharpened blue fingernail, an act that should have been impossible but for his superpower set ; connected a flat electronics board by a couple of clamps to the inner workings while commenting on his work to the three other people in the chamber.

"You don't even need to fool the optical sensor : you've just got to convince..." The smaller door hissed open. "the system that one of its stored eyeball patterns is direct input."

Beyond the sterility of the airlock was a central impressive henge of computing power surrounded by the gleaming perfection of laboratory equipment and a glassed in surgical suite with containment cages fit for everything from an elephant down to a mouse.

Taking it all in, Walker pronounced, "Excellent! I want data and samples ; 'Shot, start placing your charges for maximum..."

Partway into the establishment, her splayed hands running over the stainless steel and plastic casings of equipment and apparatuses, Jade interrupted him with a thoughtful, "Something's not *right* about this setup : it's too..."

Her partner completed the thought with, "*Perfect!*"

"That's it, precisely!" She rewarded her bodyguard a smooch. Walker watched, annoyed ; Gallo, about to place the first demo charge, amused.

"No science had been done here. There's zero Nerd residue : dried pizza sauce on buttons, frustration dents on hardware, jokey technical posters and toys. This is a sham lab!"

The team leader frowned : "In five minutes, we're destroying *a* lab."

"Fi..?!" Cobalt grabbed his vexed girlfriend. "There'll be an easily accessed access control hidden somewhere along the back wall : give me a hand!" They both took opposite ends of the wall ; began to work towards the middle, checking the wall and the equipment emplaced against it. At the four minute thirty second mark--Walker was keeping track with his Omega wristwatch--Jade called out, "Got a button labeled '*ZUTRITT*'

Walker, looking duly impressed, responded, "That's German for *access*! Push it and get back here!"

Jade made to push the button, but Cobalt intervened, took his sig other by the shoulders ; kissed her with a brisk yet precise ardor. He steered her towards the others standing by the exit, and gave her pert posterior a fond push.

"Bodyguard's prerogative!"

If not for the buss, she would have looked crestfallen as she scooted greenly towards the rest of the team. Over her shoulder, she called out as he pressed the button, "I swear, If I have to clone you again..."

His eyebrows raised in amused disbelief, Cobalt's verbal riposte was lost to the deep, bone shaking hum which filled the room as equipment recessed into the floor, ceiling and walls of the faux laboratory. When the chamber was reduced to a near featureless white space, the back wall sank into the ground to reveal an enormous platform elevator poised above a shaft leading far down into the Siberian bedrock.

Maschine's voice sounded over the team's radio net.

"Radar's clear, but it's probably only a matter of thirty minutes before I receive an intercept contact."

Walker responded "Copy that. We're descending. Expect signal loss. See you in twenty five."

"That'll be knifing it close."

Cobalt pressed the lift's single command button, cut in dryly, "*cutting* it, fraulein." as the platform began a surprisingly smooth and rapid descent into the stony depths of Siberia.

The retort distorted immediately into static.

Walker inquired of Cobalt, "Why'd we loose contact so quickly?" Cobalt shrugged ; Jade took up the answer with, "If I built a secret lab under a sham facility, I'd *absolutely* take the step to shield any emanations which might expose the ruse."

Cobalt cut an elegant flourish at his brilliant inamorata ; Walker allowed himself a curt smile ; Snapshot nodded.

Carmine pulled the faintly bored five feet of pixie into a slightly tighter clutch, and twinkled, "Spoken like you've done it yourself."

The platform emerged from the shaft into an enormous cavern ; continued its descent seemingly free of any mechanism or force. A series of fungus-like growths strewn across the stalactite spiked arch of the ceiling bathed the lab, if that was what it was, in an uncannily regular heartbeat flicker of purple light. Jade's response to Snapshot's dig was an impressed, "Nothing so audacious...or arcane!"

The platform settled into its cradle, and the team stepped into the midst of row upon row of clamshell sarcophagi surmounted by oddly sinister small dome assemblages. At the far end of the cavern, an enormous obsidian rectangular prism jutted from the irregular stone wall.

Snapshot said what all but one of them was thinking : "It looks like a fucking *cemetery*!"

Jade ran a hand over the curvature of the nearest dome crown ; down the odd cabling which connected it to the sealed carapace of the casket. "It does, but I think..." Just under the leading edge of the unit's clenched jaws, her questing fingers encountered a nodule in the otherwise smooth metal of the surface ; the top section hissed open upwards ; the hemisphere stayed level within the smooth action of a gimbal mount. "it's a medical procedure..." The interior cushioned and antiseptic possessed an elaborate and delicate headpiece that looked unpleasantly like the complex mandibles of a large insect. "...it's some kind of transference device." Cobalt noted that she touched what she thought of as a strangely beautiful mechanism with almost the same expression and caress that she used on his mechanism : Mad Scientist girlfriends!

Snapshot grumbled, "Figure it out fast, greeny, I don't like this mood lighting!"

Walker nodded. "I don't think its normal lighting, either, 'shot : before this place maybe going boomen! and our impending Russkie intercept, I want data collection and egress in no more than five minutes, Awesome ; Snap, with me : I want a look at that...block. Cobalt, stick to..."

"Like I was going to be doing anything else!" He kept his eyes up while his gal broke out her field kit and began to concentrate intensively upon sample collection.

As they approached the stories tall smooth slab of dark glass, they were greeted by a voice the message of which differed entirely from its delivery : a panic filled male voice shrieked from somewhere deep within and halfway up the structure.

"Welcome to our little..." A fit of Insane laughter ripped the voice to shreds, "...laboratory!" I'd show you around, but..."

The section of the cube from where the voice sounded glowed with a clinical light to reveal a ring of eleven interlinked disembodied human brains suspended within a bath of oxygen bubbled fluid. "...I'm..." More laughter spasmed, a tortured quality acid etching panic and fear into its peals. "...not the people that I used to be!"

"What the?"

Jade looked grimly appreciative as she said, "This is a truly-mad-science moment : someone wanted to see if linking eleven brains together would work as an expostulation of two heads are smarter than one!"

"And?"

The giggle screech of the eleven-brained voice answered, "We're *crazy* smart!"

Jade asked the composite intelligence, “Is your housing modular?”

”Da yeah si, darling, but you better hurry!” More insane laughter filled the cavern as fifteen kilograms of interlinked brain tissue and the associated life-support jacuzzi descended within the glass cube to slide out on the base on a tank treaded chassis which was presumably stored recessed under the cube.

Cobalt interrupted, “We’ve got fifteen to twenty.”

”The alarm was tripped fifteen minutes ago ; you have ten more before the Spetsnaz<sup>1</sup> arrive!”

Startled, Walker swore, “Scheiße!<sup>2</sup> Emergency Evac! Jade, Cobalt ; back to the elevator! Snapshot, Firebrand ; how much damage can you cause in five minutes?”

The sharpshooter produced twin bandoliers of grenades hidden within her bulky torso armour, and Firebrand lit herself aflame ; both women grinned.

Gallo popped two grenades, and laughed. ”This place is all of the fucked, bossman!

Looking ragged from the stresses of her extreme metabolic whiplashing, Verve, somewhere in between her usual well fed comfort zone and her supermodel death's-head form, concurred in her characteristically colourful manner with, “I can’t fully fire fuck it, but with gun gal,” She tiredly winked at Gallo. “We’ll spit roast it back to Hell!”

With a wince at the impending loss of Zeinstein only knew what scientific marvels, Jade Awesome hugged her tote bag of science plunder. “Before you burn, what about the comet?”

Walker slashed his hand forcefully in a negative slash. “There’s no...”

The brain-tank interrupted, “The Tunguska Core? Here it is, but it’s only good as a doorstep now.”

A platform hidden within the darkness of the cavern’s ceiling hovered down to rest in a circular recess in the centre of the facility. An iridescent bauble floating atop it throbbed in the dim red light, an irregular hunk of dying heart.

Walker inquired of Gallo, “Fairy’s immune to biological contaminates?”

She nodded, and scented her four foot fairy whom darted over, and back with what looked to be a hollow geode the size of a head of a toddler.

”Good thinking, Maven.”

Jade’s appreciation of Walker rose a notch : it was the official first that he had treated her as a member of the team as opposed to an inconvenient addition to it. *You’re still an asshole, but maybe you’re becoming a more likeable one, männerfleisch*

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The explosion shattered everything as a madly laughing, and rapidly reducing, Firebrand added to the devastation with twin gouts of flame from either hand which mirrored the grenade tossing wrist flicks of her companion destroyer.

Secondary explosions rocked the elevator platform as it rose towards the false lab with its cargo including a near skeletal Sara Verve, and a singed Carmine Gallo. As soon as they cleared the EM shielding, Walker signalled Maschine to prep for departure as soon as the team was aboard.

The instant response was, “Verd...God damn it boss, I was close to seeing how good an interceptor this crate was!”

As he neared the nitrogen fuming containment vessel, Cobalt cried out, “What about Sokolov?”

”No time! Besides, given what that was supposed to contain, she’s dead!”

The squad ran past the supposed tomb, Cobalt and Jade lugging what they could ransack between them in a ungainly jog-walk. The brain-tank kicked up twin rooster tails of snow from behind its treads as it easily kept pace with the group. They enthused, “This is more excitement than we’ve *ever* had!”

The transport’s rear cargo ramp dropped ; the team clambered inside, and U.S. Agent shouted to the gleaming chrome woman whom looked back at him over a shapely chromium shoulder. The moderate burr of a cockpit warning turned into the shrill wail of something catastrophic.

There was a frayed edge to the completely organic voice coming from the metal mouth of Maschine. “We’ve been *painted* : multiple LIDAR<sup>1</sup> signatures!”

The response from the big blonde soldier was almost completely free of the same tattered quality. ”Shroud Launch on my mark!”

Cobalt, hurriedly securing his package to a cargo pallet with help from the muscular Jade Awesome, inquired anxiously, “Is that dangerous?”

Carmine having secured the five foot femininity of her composite fairy sidekick into her own chair, answered this as she saw to her own safety constraints.

”An emergency blind stealth takeoff beats being blown by laser guided munitions!”

Cobalt grabbed his significant other, against her complaints about not having suitably secured hers treasures ; secured her down & bound. The gleaming steel buckles and darkly sheened restraint belts tight against the winter gear freed cling Maven’s red white & blue costume lent a depraved fetishistic flavour to the scene.

Finished, Cobalt snapped at Walker, “Don’t wait on me!” He started working on his own seat mechanism.

Braintrust, the name the collective of grey matter had just agreed upon, secured their-self to the rearmost cargo securement lock system, declared, “We too, are ready!”

U.S. Agent called out to the chromium pilot, ”Go!”

Even with the enormous amount of sound proofing built into the airframe of the cutting edge transport, the howl of engines taken to the limit as the jet lofted with a velocity further boosted by acquired Repulsor Stark Industries tech. Pressed down and back against their padded chairs, the field agents of AEGIS could do nothing but hope that their cybernetic pilot was as uncanny a pilot as she was a feminine presence.

She was, but it really didn’t matter.

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The entity within Sokolov bided its time within what was expected to be its tomb for the five minutes required for the enemy squad to be safely away before it flexed its true might ; melted the casket around it as if were nothing more substantial than ice before a blowtorch.

The figure which emerged from the slagged wreckage was no longer an age withered Sokolov : the smooth muscular nudity was a deep almost purple red ; the head atop it flesh barely stretched across the grotesque bulge of a red skull.

The voice which pushed past the *risus sardonicus*<sup>3</sup> grin asked, “That ist so much better! Where’s the challenge of a chess if the opponent doesn’t even know there’s a match in session?”

Behind him, the first of the fleet of fighters arced overhead as if on no more vital a duty than an airshow for the local wildlife.

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<sup>1</sup> The Remington Adaptive Combat Rifle is the full auto military variant of the commercial semi-auto Bushmaster. (source : Wikipedia)

<sup>2</sup> German : This is your pathetic commando force?

<sup>3</sup> German : Lying Russian motherfucker!

<sup>4</sup> Spanish: Who's the fool now, huh, you fucking parasite?

<sup>4</sup> Soviet Special Forces akin to U.S. Army Delta & Navy SEALs.

<sup>5</sup> Laser Identification Detection & Ranging.

<sup>6</sup> A reference to Ray Russell’s brilliantly gothic tale, *Sardonicus*, about a monstrous afflicted with a death’s head smile.





# Fairy Naughty Interludes & Impotent Considerations

## Chapter Summary

Carmine Gallo's sex life is as odd as it is broad. JadeBolt's biologically conventional one, based upon observation, communication and adaptation is a raging blue-giant sex-star.

Sara Verve's free time is both expected & unexpected.

Of course John Walker's sexuality is even more repressed than Blaze Tisephone/Blesse Flemmen's. They should probably become a thing to keep from blowing apart!

Johann Rusk, and his righthand frau-bot, discuss the ramifications of the Siberia mission.

Sam Rockwell's Justin Hammer in Iron Man 2 was marvellous. He's Richie Rich with just enough of a grudge, and technical talent to get himself well in over his pretty and sophisticated fast talking little head. Whim\_Wham really feels for the guy, and has rescued him for AEGIS service.

There were many pixies of differing sizes and appearances all swarming the very aroused intersex physiology of the recreating sniper and assassin of the AEGIS team, Carmine Gallo. Two of the larger ones—six inch tall ginger twins completely unlike their largest, five foot incarnation—sat astraddle Carmine's pert breasts each riding a puckered nipple large enough to be a perfectly functional cock proxy for the small, sugary scented sex-crazed sprites.

South of the nipple-riders, four one inch tall completely unique fairies worked the nine thick inches of ramrod cock with tiny saliva slicked hands and hummingbird tongues while two fractal accumulations of pixies so small as to be a prismatic pattern of massed swirled polychromatic wings paid sexy swarm attention to the swollen purple glans, and the lubricant slicked, flushed vulva below where testes would be if the owner had been, in any way, conventional.

Carmine Gallo so thronged, fairy-gangbanged, was reduced to a writhed expanse of pleasure wracked flesh, flailed limb scattered beads of sweat, and the musky perfume of Cowper's fluid, Bartholin Gland lubricants and saliva. When she came, explosively, volcanically, the glans flock coagulated into one completely dual-cum<sup>1</sup> covered four foot Bukkake-Belle who fell back messily on the bedclothes to lazily and sexily splay. The two nipple humping half-footers orgasmed a simultaneously and surprisingly strong scent of sassafras roots<sup>2</sup> and, for their diminutive size, considerable quantities of sticky, glossy come which covered the swell of each breast like a syrup glaze on ice cream sundaes. Satiated, at least for a time, they whirled drunkenly into the main mass to fully return Fairy Ring to her complete royal self.<sup>3</sup>

Carmines snuggled up against her semen spattered quantum cutie, her half flagged penis already beginning to stiffen as it slid up against the warm, wetted flesh of Fairy Ring's flat, not quite six-packed stomach. She puffed a horny, hot breath of liquirice at the her partner which was unnecessarily carried by her nose line mechanism to the receiver whom was wriggling sensually up against her stickily, sweatily and desirously. Her response, not scented but tactile, was to wrap both small hands about the glossy penile shaft ; guided its cum glazed glans in-between the heated satin folds of Pixie vulva.

Carmines gasped at the sensations of sinking into the flesh of the four foot winged sexpot before she rolled onto her back, the fully formed Fairy Ring rapturously impaled upon her coming up into a fantasy land variant of the classic cowgirl sex position ; started her wild silent but clamorous scented ride atop the woman whom was sexily loud in smell and in sound. It was these that the couple in the next room overheard, and were both stimulated & underpowered by.

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Cobalt and Jade Awesome worked away at that oldest of all of sex positions, the venerable Missionary. It was very pleasant, but, given the time they'd been perfectly synched in the well oiled steam engine dynamics, neither participant had achieved anything more than a gentle, lengthy non-orgasmic pleasure.

The blue skinned man with a completely regular physique hiding remarkable physical and super powered prowess, smiled into the angular green face of his lover scant inches away.

"We're both a bit distracted."

Jade kissed a hanging drip of sweat away from the tip of her man's nose before she agreed.

"How do Gallo & Fairy Ring make love?"

"Ah!" Cobalt replied, with an amused lift of his right eyebrow and the opposite corner of his mouth. "That's what's keeping you from *cresting*".

Jade returned the amusement with an open grin as she riptosed him with, "And where's your *tsunami*?"

Cobalt's scarred face assumed a sudden seriousness as he said, "I'm worried."

"About me?" She sucked the tip of the nose, and drew her tongue tip down to flick across his lips.

He returned a more adroit tongue slip across his lips with a less grammatically capable than it was emotionally charged grammatical misstep.

"About *we*!"

"Agrammatical cuteness aside, haven't we always lived dangerously?"

"I suspect not as dangerously as our new mixed-up life is." He punctuated it with a nip to the tip of slightly upturned green nose. The nipped yipped ; rubbed her sniffer protectively before noting, "Our old lives must have been super cushy if *this* is our new dangerous!"

He grinned hugely, a maniacal laugh rising with the dual risings of his body to standing, and the blue wilt in between his cyan legs swelling and lengthening with a serpentine fascination for the bird sprawled below.

"Does the bodyguard *need* to instruct the guarded body in the ways of the new hard reality?

Wide eyed, with almost iris eclipsed pupils, Jade enthused, "He *does!*" She slid onto her belly, presented her taut, green-apple ass, a perfect tear drop of her arousal distending from the flushed lips nestled at the base of the bum. "I'm ready for *instruction!*"

He clasped a muscular cheek in either hand, and began the lesson with a smooth, gentle glide to which the so instructed opined, "*This* is your lesson? I need to cram for the exam!" Her giggle was husky.

He modified his pedagogical pace to suit his student's educational needs ; sweet lethargy was replaced with sweaty liveliness. Jade came for the first of many times with an utter full-throated abandon which caught the attention of the one-room-over fully assemed pixie-swarm.

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Four feet of pert Fairy Ring slipped off of her lover's sex slicked phallus to attend to the sexy symphony sounding through from the quarters one room over. She exuded the complex scent sentence which Gallo's fairy-trained mind translated into, "Listen to them fuck!"

Carmine, keeping her cock fully cocked with lazy shaft strokes, blew her response back with the aid of her nose-line scent producer.

"What's this? Is my green fairy<sup>4</sup> suddenly able to share her lay?"

A fresh bout of wanton whooping whomped through the wall in between the thoroughly screwing and the fairy fantasy fingerer ; the latter writhing against the piston action of what was now half of her hand deep within the silken folds of her drooling sex.

The scent message barely rising above the pungent odours of sweat, saliva and sex was the complimentary earthy exclamation which Carmine's limited Ecomancer training translated as, "I know you want them ; *now*, so do I! I mean, listen to them *fuck* : who wouldn't want that?"

The crown princess of the Tinker Belles swirled a sweat and saliva wetted finger over the pouty pinch of nipple as her body answered her question with an orgasm which kept her from framing her resultant question for a good minute of the odiferous thrashings of diminutive fairy anatomy.

As she laid, spayed, sweat beaded breasts heaving prettily from her exertions, Fairy Ring asked her mostly human lover, and nominal master<sup>5</sup> But will they *ever* want to fuck us?"

Snapshot smiled, added a finger to tease at the anal end of her supernatural boo.

With a relatively straightforward scent of sharp ginger chuckle telegraphed above the honey and dark chocolate of arousal, she slid her teasing digit within the squirming, honey scented Tink's into one end of the pixie princess as the other end processed the horny scent-joke, "In the end, they will!"<sup>6</sup>

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Sara Verve sprawled her enormous comfort cocoon of decadent flesh across the cheap, easily cleaned ice cream splashed vinyl of her couch as she finished off her twentieth quart of every goddamn flavour Ren & Harry had ever infused into their creamy ice cream goodness.

Belching, she tossed the exhausted container into the extra flame proof corner of her quarters for eventual incineration. The relaxed look of happy contentment upon the bloated face would have shocked her associates far more than would have her sheer bulk. A happy little noise burbled past her lips as she settled in for her actual guilty pleasure, a binge session of reading something which almost didn't reminded her of her pre-drug cartel murder days.

There were many, many other books in the *actual* library in the Washington D.C. AEGIS facility ; she felt a dissolute sexual appreciation for the one specific book : the slightly damp, and stained text trapped in between her pudgy fingers was, fittingly enough, a Spanish copy of Fahrenheit 451.

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John Walker's room was Spartan right down to its little, usually hidden, altar to his man-crush to whom he, with a complex expression of self-reproach & yearning, beat one off on an organ as physically impressive as the rest of the buff, blonde beefcake. Far too fastidious to spew his seed across the military precision of his quarters, the red faced, groaning, sweaty Walker, right hand still furiously stroking a shaft slicked with precum infused lotion, deftly launched himself into the room's small washroom. He nosily spasmed a sizeable quantity of come into the cold ceramic pool of the toilet which with the flick of a sweaty hand, became a swirled maelstrom straight to the water purification system .

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"Two things are apparent from the telemetry and team debriefin's : one, It would appear that either Sokolov's always been Kleiser, or he went and 'placed her some'tam in the past ; t'other, he *knew* that we were com'n."

Rusk, seated next to the tangle of instrumentation and gurgling, wheezing mechanisms of Kioni's hospital bed, spoke to his American redhead executive assistant variant of his right hand woman, Blaze Tisephone, whom leant against the wall with almost the exact amount of the required nonchalant feminine aplomb of the corporate warrior woman. If anything, the thigh revealing hip tilt against the wall was a *trifle* overplayed ; his almost completely

dormant sexual drive admired the razor's edge in between the hem of her ultramarine blue mini skirt, and whatever it was which was still barely concealed by the high reaching hemline.

His spoken observation obscured his unspoken one as the woman wearing the Dior skirt under a masculine blue blazer over an equally masculine pearl shirt and red grenadine tie shifted her weight away from the wall to stand with her native Prussian erectness.

"It certainly explains why the modern fragments of HYDRA couldn't locate him, and..." A sudden realization widened his eyes almost to the size of his undisguised self. "Ah'll just betcha' if we could take a gander at the good Sokolov's research afta' she vanished into Redland<sup>7</sup> we could nail down if and when he replaced her!

"How do you mean?"

Sokolov was an idealistic humanist ; Kleiser vied with Strucker as the most inhumane of our former employer's cronies. If he replaced her, the giveaway will be the nature of the good doctor's research : it'll be something so seemingly pointlessly cruel as to appear literally inhuman."

Blaze cum Blesse caught the key word, and to her boss' satisfaction, based her next question upon it with a eyebrow raised, "Seeming?"

Rusk's handsome fifty-something features dragged down in a saturnine frown : "At the time, I thought his whole 'genda was noth'n more than curry'n favour with der Führer ; now I know I misjudged him. His cruelty wasn't pointless : his presence in the present proves it!"

"And now he is our enemy."

"I think *somehow* he was always that."

"And what of our *other* enemy?"

"The one 'mongst us?" Rusk tapped an elegant forefinger against the chiseled fakery of his chin. "Presum'n he didn't resurrect one of other known Tech 'Jects<sup>8</sup>, we have a fox in the henhouse."

She leaned extra heavily into her American disguise with an accent so lubricious as to be almost unrecognizable as she hefted her hands up in a theatrical shrug of confusion.

"Suh-gah, wha' da, Kay-nines and rooh-stahs hav' ta' do wit' anytang?"

Rusk grinned frighteningly.

"Enemy sleeper agents, my excitable one." The grin levelled out into a flat expression on iota short of a scowl. "Also, if you ever refer to me as your *sprinkled Sweetness* ever again..."

Blaze blazed crimson ; stammered, "Che...Boss, forgive me! It is just a *churn* of phrase! I meant nothing by it!"

The apologized to did nothing to correct the expression to its proper *turn* of phrase as he redirected the conversation back to his intended focus.

"We'll Keep things running as if we've missed the *obvious* message, while the team goes on a highly visible R&R."

Finally back on the same page as her boss, Blaze, actually flashing an eye full of scarlet underwear as her energies, redirected back towards her boss' intentions, sprang her towards an energetic upraised arm gesture of anticipated success.

"While we expose the traitors!"

Rusk snapped his fingers, and said with *exactly* the right amount of pride, "There's my Second in Command!" ; Blesse Flammen was still his forever.

Seeing Dr. Lilith Atman through the glass of the hospital room, Rusk altered the topic of conversation to the bedridden and unconscious Kioni Kimani.

"Ah, here's th' good doc!" He waved the petite Indian woman into the room ; she entered with the no nonsense efficiency which many mistook for a cold demeanour.

"Rusk, Tisephone, EEG readings suggest that our patient is about to revive." As if on cue, one of the graphical displays of the patient's life signs chirruped, and the teenager attached to it by electrodes stirred ; opened her eyes ; completed the exclamation which was so violently interrupted the day before.

"It's not Sokolov!"

Ready with the tiny remote control in the hand casually resting in his uniform jacket pocket to engage the emergency Faraday cage hidden within the the ceiling mounted curtain ring assemblage which surrounded the hospital bed, Rusk leaned in, " We know who it isn't, Wargame ; do you know who it is?"

Dr. Atman, flashing a pencil flashlight in her patient's eyes to gauge pupillary response, intoned, "As I am neither a spy nor a sleeper, I do not wish to know anything other than the condition of my patient."

Rusk's facade was all amused agreement ; his interior mindset was also amused, but with a thoughtful edge : he thought, *Is that how the Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain<sup>9</sup> play is supposed to be made?* On the surface, his genial grin, sly wink, and stage whispered, "Don'cha worry doc! We won't mix medical secrets & State secrets : that'd mix up the poisons wit' th' cures ; and that'd really put the rattlers in with the pups!"

The Indian woman understood the idea without fully following the colourful analogy as she completed the assessment of Kioni's quick cognitive assessment. She returned the flashlight to the breast pocket of her medical smock ; amscrayed to the relative safety of her medical department of the AEGIS facility.

The black teenager, fragile and diminutive looking amongst the sterility of the bed and the tangle of dormant life support equipment, waited until the door wheezed shut on its pneumatic hinge ; “You don’t need Faraday, Boss.”

Rusk’s neatly nailed hand slid from the pocket with a gunslinger’s grace, the small emergency trigger left behind within the finely tailored jacket pocket. He could sense the teen’s oddly adult quiet anger ; he knew who towards who it was directed, and it welded her aged a to his.

He let a little of his underlying self out with a conspiratorial wink. "What brought you ‘round, ‘Game?’”

The scrunched look of Kioni’s face echoed in her knees drawing up towards her chest under the bed sheets as she struggled to explain to herself, let alone Rusk, why she felt differently about her nominal kidnapper.

The usually super confident and self assured teenager stammered, “W-W-When Kleiser’s mind touched mine, I felt a...reptile glee in hurting me.” She shivered. “So cold, but somehow also happy! How can that be?”

Schmidt, behind the handsome facade of Rusk, restrained the urge to smooth the cornrows of dark hair above the furrowed brow ; he thought, *This is the gift of my servitude to the Soul Stone : a gift which the Red Skull would only see as a curse : compassion. Not enough to make me a saint, thank Odin ; but enough to make me care for my own. One day I will have to inform Herr Barton how much his liebchen’s sacrifice had also affected the other witness of that world redeeming event. Of course, I will resemble a certain arrow ridden saint<sup>10</sup> before I could explain myself.*

All of this flashed through his mind fast enough that there was only the slightest pause before he replied to Kioni’s question with a resolute response which felt a little less certain to his own lobeless ears.

“I knew Kleiser a long time ago, and he was a reptile in the skin of a man back then ; now he is probably crazy as well as cold.”

The body language and expression of the girl suddenly smoothed out and extended to her unscrunched self with an almost luminous burst of comprehension. The words poured from the unguarded portion of the girl who was otherwise careful to deal with the world as a steel skinned, and obsidian hearted warrior of profit.

”I *hated* you until *he* so easily shut me down....”

”And now?” It was risky interrupting such a volatile and powerful person ; Schmidt, with his Cosmically infused mundane ability—at that exact moment he realized that he was one of exactly two creatures touched by any of the stones to have survived being uplifted ; the other being the tragic child of Ultron and Anthony Stark, the Vision ; he existed now only as a lost soul within the fractured mind of a self exiled god<sup>11</sup>. It was a part of why Schmidt was no longer his terrible old self.

"You're taking better care of me than any of my foster parents, the orphanage before, or anyone else ever would ; I understand that now, and..."

He couldn't help himself. "You need help to do to him what he did to you." It wasn't a question."

She didn't look put out at being interrupted again so much as impressed that he could read her so accurately.

"I want his last memory to be regret that he ever fucked with me, with *us*!"

Knowing that the removal of Kleiser from the world would only benefit everybody else, Dell Schmidt replied, "We will do that, and more, to him : we'll erase him from the world. How's that?"

The young woman's reply relit the fierceness the fires of which had been dampened since her near destruction : "That'd be just about *perfect*, boss!"

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The aggregate entity self identified as Brain Trust was vastly entertained by the ongoing process within the High Integrity Vault Enclosure thirteen floors under the surface of the Tidal Basin.

A cadre of clean suited technicians indistinguishable from each other within their bulbous protective wear deployed steel insect antennae and detectors within the tank containing the eleven entities which combined the entertained Brain Trust.

The multiple overlapped voices inquired via the quadraphonic speaker system of the gleaming surgical theatre, "What's the plan, Stan?"

The lead technician, the chest name tag stencilled, Dr. Hammer, nodded at the readout of the probe extended into the brain bath ; removed his helmet to reveal the enthusiastically buoyant features of a thirty something man still possessed of the charming, slightly awkward naughtiness of half his actual age. He slipped a lollipop out of sealed pocket in his suit, gave it a thoughtful suck ; answered with a boyish smile, "Men, and if my ears don't deceive me, more than one lady, how'd you all like your very own bodies?"

There was a giddy quality to the Hope in the composite voice : "Flesh and blood like Pinocchio?"

The lollipop took a slow turn in the puckered mouth before it was plucked out, red and glistening, by a orange gloved hand.

"Would you settle for robots for now? They're really boss ; my very own design!"

"And *real* bodies later?"

The saliva wetted globe of cherry red jutted towards the brain collation with candied certainty.



“You bet! It’s really not my bag, but someone around here’s bound to be good with organs, skin and all of that gooey stuff!”

"Alternate : but I hear that Dr. Ross really knows her organs from her Wurlitzers!"

The collection of Central Nervous System control systems would have nodded with cherry wariness had they had heads with which to nod.

“It’ll be enough for we to be me times twelve.”

“How do you get twelve me-s out of eleven thees?”

“Easy : we concocted a twelfth, our baby disembrained intelligence, Brainby Brain-Brain Jr.”

Not knowing exactly how to play that one, Hammer fell back on his superpower, glibness as the candy wove up and down in a somehow more eloquent than ridiculous pass of a conductor’s wand ordering an orchestra.

”Robots for every-body-to-be!” He quietly added, “Be they real or not.”

”What was that?” Hammer thought he detected a tease of mirth in the eerie mass voice.

He popped the candy back into his mouth ; spoke around it as if it were a cherry cigar.

”I’ll do it with *zeal*!”

”We’re so glad to hear that!”

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“You understand that these are just the dealer cars, right? Your sports cars, your badass rides will take awhile to calibrate! They’re real precision instruments, works of profound art! I get misty just thinking about ‘em!” He wiped an imaginary tear from behind a lens of his almost nerdy glasses.

Hammer’s spiel, made next to the chunky frame of one of the drones which had landed him in his submarine prison gig all those months earlier, was unnecessary; he liked the razzle-dazzle fast talk angle : it had a verve which dovetailed nicely with his younger than his actual year’s appearance.

He continued. “Dr. Belisnsky<sup>12</sup> is the one who will *womanhandle* packing each of you into this, *for now*.” He manipulated a control situated under the synthetic SCM musculature in between the modified skull casing and the torso of the robotic unit ; the former of the two parts of the robot clam shelled open to reveal the brain receptacle with its complex array of gleaming nerve receptors & the precisely machined concave curvature of the ceramic-graphite grid of the Neural Organizer Graphite Graph Internalized Network<sup>13</sup> lining the technological brainpan.

”We’d very much love to meet her prior to the separation event!”

Hammer was expansive. “Of course! It’s important to meet the person who’s going to lance your boil, set your broken bone, or transplant your brain into a machine! I can have her down here in ten minutes! How’s that?”

Brain Trust was onboard for being outboard.

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<sup>1</sup>Being Intersexual, she generates enough of both sex types of ejaculate fluid to drench the much smaller Fairy Ring/Tinker Belles.

<sup>2</sup> Sassafras is much more fun to write and say than root beer.

<sup>3</sup> Fairy Ring is a society ordered around size : the queen exists as smaller versions of herself down to 12 inches, of which there can be four of her. Below that threshold, there are hornier, less useful minor royalty. One inch is the tallest that can be given orders other than boffing, but they better be simple & brief. Under an inch, the rabble generates the enormous reservoir of MF (Magical Fucking) power from which Ecomancers draw their power. Theoretically, like turtles, it’s fairies all the way down to the fabled sub-quantum pixie-particle!

<sup>4</sup> Wordplay: The Green Fairy is the name of their favourite alcoholic beverage, Absinthe ; it is also how Fairy Ring usually feels about anyone else Carmine flirts with. Fairy Ring isn’t a yandere (Fatal Attraction Anime Gal), yet.

<sup>5</sup> Mistress is akin to the words which end in -trix (aviatrix, dominatrix, etc.) : it’s unduly gendered. Also, whereas master is also old fashioned, Whim\_Wham uses it to evoke the usual relationship in between an Ecomancer and their enslaved magical battery. Carmine & Ring share something much more mutual.

<sup>6</sup> If it sounds unduly sinister, it’s actually nothing more than a combination of Gallo’s sexual confidence with her appreciation of a well cleansed tailpipe.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Fleming’s invented MI-6 designation for the Soviet Union.

<sup>8</sup> Tech ‘Ject : Also known as Scanners & Trons, these were individuals with the capacity to extend their senses and nervous systems along the technological pathways of the modern world. Wargame has the added dimension of being able to reach across the EM spectrum to be able to commandeer orbital satellites. Of the thirteen known T‘Jects, Kioni is the only surviving practitioner ; that is another story.

<sup>9</sup> Almost all of Whim\_Wham’s writings contain at least one filmic Wizard of Oz quote or allusion ; this one is a very weak gaslighting attempt.

<sup>10</sup> St. Sebastian to be precise and on target.

<sup>11</sup> Whim\_Wham believes that this fits into canon continuity : Wanda is currently in her personal Overlook cabin trying to come to terms with her horrible bout of full-on supervillantry.

<sup>12</sup> Tania Belinsky, otherwise known as Starlight, is a Russian ex-pat neurosurgeon & superhero whose defection was one of the first actions of AEGIS.

<sup>13</sup> That's right : it's the NOGGIN!

# Clause for Escape

## Chapter Summary

B.A.D Girls Inc. (canonical), first met way back in chapter three when they ogled Jade & Cobalt as the couple and triple were on their separate ways to job interviews in the very same Washington D.C. government building--the Cannon House (non-fictional), are reneging on their Roxxon contract rendered null & void in their minds by weird shit.

Another two emergency plans are launched partway through the other escape ; they have to be accounted for with Der Boss.

The explosion back lit the giant trunks of the rainforest and the underside of the canopy with lurid roiling orange light. Also illuminated by the angry firelight were three black tactical garbed females pushing through the giant ferns on the forrest floor covered by a luminous ground fog swirled by the rapid passage of the three hustling figures.

The tallest of the three turned to the shortest, and plumpest of the three, stated, "You used all the explosives."

The addressed removed her night vision goggles, already overtaxed by the flare of firelight. The balaclava came next to reveal the shock of magenta hair above green eyes. She shouldered her H&K, ran a hand across her sweaty brow.

"You saw what they were doing ; I had no choice but to use everything!"

The third woman shot a glance over her shoulder from her rearguard position. Her voice had a musical lilt out of keeping with the blunt black lethality of her tactical vest, night scope, and automatic rifle.

"We saw, but if the jungle burns, we burn."

"We're fine : the forest's too moist to catch."

"What's too moist is you for blowing shit up."

"And you aren't for fondling joysticks?"

That hit a nerve : "Flying's saved our collec..."

The interchange had the flatness of a ritual ; the leader squashed it : "Moist I be the one to point out that you, Tan, love Rach because her sexual demolitions are every bit as mind blowing as her plastique demolitions are destructive ; you, Rach, love Tan, because she literally sweeps us off of our feet!"

Cleo's leadership style, an odd English major soft shoe of punning and dry humour, worked with exactly two other people ; fortunately the two other people were Rachel Leighton & Tanya Sealy, both of which immediately stopped their Spock & Bones<sup>1</sup> squabble.

Rach slipped her head gear back in place, and somehow managed to be energetic and contrite as she said, "And that's exactly why you're on top!"

Tanya echoed this sentiment with a coolly astute, "And we're under you : we're a bit too crazy for each other ; need you to administer spankings to keep us properly bent<sup>2</sup>."

A luminous series of brilliant stems of light arced high into the sky behind the team, and crazy shadows danced across the foliage as the parachute flares began to drift down towards the ground.

Rachel affected an amused attitude which would have convinced the other two if they hadn't witnessed the same monstrous event which the youngest of them was trying to now be cavalier about : they had seen their own horror mirrored within her puckish face.

"Think the reptiloids are pissed?"

Under her facial covering and starlight scope, Tanya blanched; bleated a shocked laugh.

"Fuck! That conspiracy actually exists<sup>3</sup>?"

Cleopatra attempted her leadership levity with an only slightly shivery, "Apparently, but are You really surprised that oil company bigwigs are literally cold hearted lizards?"

Tanya nodded quietly, minutely : Rach shouted, "Fuck, yeah!"

"Honestly, that makes three of us!" Cleo raised her left wrist, pulled the Velcro cover off of her Nav-Sat display ; relayed the pertinent data to her team with a cigar roughened voice dropped back down to complete professionalism with a greater expenditure of energy which would have been necessary if actual lizard aliens weren't involved.

"This is when you stop your bitching about the expense of that extra-contractual escape clause we've never ever used?"

The response was similar, if voiced with very different levels of emotion : Rach exuded another enthusiastic, "Fuck, YEAH!" ; Tanya pointedly dropped a controlled, "Indeed, yes.

"Good, cause not only are we're not getting paid for ditching this gig, but it's going to cost extra to recondition the Bug-Out after we bug-out in it."

The leader aligned their position in relation to Their emergency escape vehicle, and relayed the data to The other's slaved devices. A rapid glimpse sufficed for both ; they fell in behind their boss on the final half klick push to the single most expensive item which they expended considerable funds towards.

Behind them, at an indeterminate distance, a weird howl rose towards the red under lit shadows of the forest canopy.

Rachel, the most imaginative of the three, exclaimed, “They’ve got Gekko Dogs! Move, move, move!”

The trio, two behind Cleo in a minimum phalanx<sup>4</sup> did exactly that : aligned with the range & bearing of their literal escape clause, they raced through the undergrowth and mist without regard for anything but what was behind them ; given that they only had Rachel’s fanciful approximation of what those horrors really were, they relied completely upon the ghostly visual resolution of their night vision equipment, and their innate grace—considerable—to carry them speedily to what they could only hope was safe egress from dangerously undefined peril.

The otherworldly bays closed at a rate which terrestrial canines would be incapable ; Rachel, the gamer of the group, gasped, “Forget the Gekkos, they’ve got motherfuck’n Blink Dogs<sup>5</sup>!” She checked her Nav data, grimly stated to the others, “They’re going to catch us before we can get to the Bug!”

Cleo concurred. She assessed their tactical position with what was her actual as opposed to her shiny superpower<sup>6</sup> ; positioned her teammates in the absolutely perfect defensive positions for an incoming attack unknown to her forebrain, but not to her subtle meta ability.<sup>7</sup>

Situated within the opening of a defile, unbeknownst to her within the limited visibility of her technologically improved night-vision, Cleo positioned her crew in a manner which would have impressed Leonidas. They occupied the top of a low hog’s back ridge the sides of which, largely invisible to the murky green tunnel vision of the night scopes, would make it impossible for them to be flanked or surrounded by their attackers, presuming that they were earthbound.

With an economic series of gestures, Cleo directed her teammates to cover the two fields of fire oblique to her centre section straight down what she now noted as the high ground her talent had staked out as their defensive position. They crouched, raised their rifles ; waited for whatever they were that yelped like a nightmare’s approximation of Benji<sup>8</sup>.

The giant ferns, spectral in the greenish fog, rustled and shook as low, indistinct torpedo forms sped through them on their way to their targets.

Cleo meant to be precise and cool ; she found herself roaring, “Centre-line fire! Mow the mother fucking lawn, ladies!”

The vision compensation software went into overdrive as three matte black muzzles erupted with the staccato lightning and thunder of full auto gunfire. Ferns within the arc of fire fell scythed by the fusillade ; mighty tree trunks erupted splinters of wood and bark. Within the botanical storm, half seen animal forms screamed and writhed, and howled ; kept on coming.

All three women met the noise and fury with their very own battle screams which would have put the ice in the backbone of either side at the battles of Antietam or the Second Battle of

Brandy Station<sup>9</sup> as they poured state of the art kinetic chemical firepower down range. Something got through.

Cleo staggered back under the impact of the blunt muzzle of a creature so riddled with bullets that it was impossible to say what it was originally like besides being a bloody, shredded mouth with way too many needle teeth. She felt the savage jerk as it bit into and tore away her tactical vest before she gripped its head ; exuded what she hoped to the goddess was as poisonous to this beast as it was to terrestrial ones.

The thing writhed, howled, and spewed foul steaming yellow fluid—blood?—as it subsided into death or something very much like it. Cleo flung the inert body into the woods, and, somewhat more in control of herself for having dispatched the unknown, intoned, “Load on the road : double time it!”

A new sound rose to the night sky far to the rear ; it sounded like a frustrated & furious steam locomotive. The image of two-hundred tons of steam screaming iron, or whatever the hell it was bearing down on them made the three women sprint through the treacherous green landscape until their instrumentation chirruped that they had arrived at the escape ship coordinates.

Cleo removed the Velcro flap cover from her other wrist ; flipped up the cage, and depressed the stud labelled Bug-Out ; a quantity of real estate twenty metres away erupted in a flurry of shaped explosive charges. When the smoke cleared, the butt-plug of the unlovely, but very much loved by three specific ladies, ovoid of the Bug-Out Ballistic Acceleration Lickety-split Lifter System <sup>10</sup> sprawled in the centre of the cleared out crater.

The trio of hatches arrayed around the hull snapped open, and the three warriors stowed their gear in overhead compartments before they quickly secured themselves to their custom fitted acceleration seats. The doors snapped close, internal power whirred and flashed to life ; Cleo reached above her to the single toggle switch labelled, ‘Bug-Out’ ; her companions confirmed it with their own toggling of their ‘Bug-Out’ switches. The command screen in Cleo’s compartment reflected the consensus, and the knock-off Stark Industry Repulsor drive punched the escape craft into a high gravity liftoff and turn maneuver which blacked out the passengers with the Newtonian ferocity of physical force.

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Underneath the perpetually phase-shifted<sup>11</sup> Eidolon hotel, within the cavernous AEGIS command centre lit by the large trio of wall screens with their digital real-time world map, an AEGIS lieutenant noted a crimson pulsed triangle trailing a fiery track up and away from the Eastern African coastal nation, Zu Wenig<sup>12</sup>.

As anonymous as any other well turned out twenty-something in uniform, she informed the duty officer, a distinguished looking man with the slightly less smooth facial features of the early thirties, but the grey shot, close-shaved sideburns of an older man.

“Sir, we have a Tail-Fire alert, Latitude: 0° 39' 38.08" North Longitude: 14° 53' 47.69. It's Zu Wenig, sir.”

A sheen of sweat rose on the duty officer's forehead, the only sign of his body suddenly ramping up with a stress response to the potential horror developing. He managed to keep his voice professionally neutral as he enquired, "Confidence check."

The pony-tailed blonde bathed an eerie green-blue by her monitoring station which contained that required region, tapped the required keystones to verify the signal, or clear a digital mirage ; replied with an almost mechanistically clipped, "Confidence is high : tracking single Tail-Fire event."

The duty officer rammed his fear into the back of his brain with the rote training of soldiery.

"Resolve target."

"Sir!" The meta-data on the big screen lit up next to the rapidly ascending vehicular track as the display altered in a dizzying zoom ending at a satellite closeup image of what was now obviously a nose one of some sort under motive force other than conventional rocketry.

The duty officer had his heart rate and adrenaline under some semblance of normalcy as he ordered the communications officer, "Flash Crystal Palace & Red Land that the bird is of an unknown type, lift system indeterminate." He tapped the lieutenant on the shoulder. "LT, plug me through to..."

Rusk's smoking hot redhead lieutenant entered the chamber ; not knowing if it was by coincidence or design, the young man felt his anxiety returning. There was something about the perfection of her form and the way she moved which inspired an odd sense of dread which tinged the otherwise normal male mammalian fascination with ridiculously pretty & graceful women. He broke out in a heavier sweat than when he was confronted with a potential nuke launch.

Her walk was somehow both sexy and martial ; he would have wondered if he had a desire to be dominated if it weren't for the nebulous fear which the woman raised within the ancient pathways of his mind & very being.

She noted the subtle visual cues of the otherwise admirable self control of the AEGIS officer. She found a shivery little trill of pleasure run up her Geist-Eisen<sup>14</sup> spine at his horny unease in her presence. She thought, He's cute enough ; he's smart enough ; if I don't ficken soon, I'm going to wild werden, and sweet, sweet Boss'll fire mein arsch.<sup>15</sup>

Pierce, first name Lance, felt impaled upon the ice blue gaze which somehow had taken him in his his entirety without even the tiniest flicker of iris. To his terrified delight, the only way to describe the tension of spiritual terror against the bodily lust warring within him, he noted that the woman's pupils widened perceptively as she regarded him ; he thought, Aphrodite wants me ; exactly how screwed am I?

She addressed him with the musical lilt of an accent so far south of the Mason-Dixon Line<sup>16</sup> that no one on the sizeable staff was able to identify its actual Southern geographical region. It was assumed that the boss adopted it for its folksiness ; her lieutenant had picked it up—it had, over time, over written some guttural European thing—either as a conscious suck up, or as a deeper, less self aware form of adulation, parental or otherwise.



"This is a special case, Lance ; Ah'll handle it." She smiled in a manner which was supposed to be alluring, but it had a hunger which gave it a predatory edge. "Ah'll brief you this evening : come by mah quarters at sixteen hundred."

There was nowhere for the painful erection to go but straight to an impressive bulge in his inseam.

The entirety of the regional survey crew had been monitoring exactly the one thing they shouldn't have been watching; fortunately, nothing untoward occurred during those twenty five seconds of office melodrama. If a AEGIS telepath had been actively present, SHe would have detected the early social-thought patterns which usually ended up as betting pools regarding the professional and emotional outcomes of workplace flings.

Saluting wasn't an official practice, but he felt that he had to do something to offset the other, lower salute ; what his approximation missed in precision it made up for in earnestness ; she couldn't help equating it to his type seventy five years earlier. Her magic-tech fusion nervous system began to prepare her physiology for what was shaping up to be a memorable professional briefing followed by a literal debriefing.

Dismissed, Pierce had no choice but to lead erection first to the exit front and centre of the command dic...deck ; every eye in the facility caused an itch he dared not scratch high up in between his shoulder blades. Once the doors slid shut behind him, he heaved an enormous sigh of relief, and started running national capitals through his mind to topple his tower as he worked his way up towards the lowest of the subsurface levels, the AEGIS staff quarters.

\*\*\*\*

Back in the Command Deck, Blaze realigned the room back to its actual work with a laconic, "Target?"

"Approaching apogee, sir!"

She handed the blonde, whom had a blood rushed flush of adrenaline which pumped her looks up beyond vaguely pretty, a *priority splinter* : she had only heard of them in training ; had never had to stab one into the system.

"Transmit this on the encoded frequency."

The lieutenant, forgot to acknowledge the order even as she carried it out ; snapped open the cage over an isolated portion of the console ; slid the ominously red & black spike into the perfect fit of the receptacle ; watched as her console was overridden by what was within the splinter's algorithmic guts.

Her command screen read, *Transmitting...positive contact : positive command override.*"

"Orders, sir?"

"Hold escape vehicle in orbit ; prep intercept, launch imminent."

The assembled staff didn't know who was aboard the escape craft, but the same nebulous group thought centred upon the opinion that whoever they were they were just about as important in the moment as was the dubiously lucky man who had just left their presence. More successfully than he, they processed their orders without their commander caring at all of their continuing fascination action with the situation, so long as it didn't interfere with their individual & collective efficiencies : it didn't, so she didn't.< /p>

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Twenty minutes later, Blaze was at the controls of of a V-3 vertical lift boosted variant of the Blackbird jet<sup>17</sup>. She launched uninterrupted within inter-spatial region of inter-multi-space to effect the very dangerous entrance into her home dimensional reality with the jet's enormously expensive onboard dimensional transit suite at the exact moment when her own orbital turn wouldn't light up every ballistic defensive system in the world at once.

Fortunately, the aether<sup>18</sup> was as calm as she had ever seen it which denoted that it was the odd day when no one and nothing was attempting or succeeding at the act of transiting realities. The Blackbird shuddered as the twin V-3 rockets detached after they had boosted the swept winged elegance of the vehicle to the coordinates which, back in her facet of the Mutiverse, correlated with the commencement of her pitch-over maneuver into an intercept orbit with the target vehicle.

The unlikely modification to the Blackbird's instrument panel of an elaborately carved cube of bluestone paired her to the mechanism of the jet as if it were an extension of her body. It was far easier for her to control this bird than the one which was almost brought down by the electromagnetic pulse of that near-miss nuke in Siberian airspace.

She sensed the exact moment when the glowing instruments called for the zero gravity turn ; she willed the maneuver as she activated the device which smoothly slid the airframe through the boundary layer, and back into the sudden grandeur of the brilliant curvature of the Earth below the shining spray of stars strong enough to shine through the Earthlight.

The brightest of these was the object of the mission : the escape capsule exactly where telemetry placed it. Blaze nudged her control rockets minutely ; brought the much larger bulk of the black ship alongside the drifting jewel. She locked the Blackbird's controls, and went about prepping the rear pressurized cargo hold to bring the pod aboard.

She sealed her life functions, and set herself to her self contained fifteen minute air supply before cycling through the cramped airlock, and easing gracefully out into the eternal speed-fall of being a person sized moon of planet Earth. A tiny magnetic pod adhered to her gleaming back puffed the attitude corrections she required to catch the small craft which she eased back, and up onto the Blackbird's open cargo ramp. She waited until the ramp had carried its cargo up and into the body of the jet before she returned to the interior of the craft ; prepared to return to inter-dimensional atmosphere.

\*\*\*\*

Seated behind his streamlined steel and glass desk, within his retro-modern private office atop the Eidolon ; far removed from the sensible and secure choice of a one deep within the

underground AEGIS command facility, Dell Schmidt, was, at that moment, too focused upon another subject to be able to enjoy the reason why his office was so damn exposed, the view.

The subject of his gaze, re-sheathed within her redhead skin, Blesse, known as Blaze in the skin-suit, Prussian-click-saluted her mannish shoes, and bobbed a martial bow to her boss.

Relaxed at her German behaviour since they were in his private office, Johann Rusk finally came to a decision about this rebellious streak which had developed within his oldest, most trusted lieutenant. He had used the time it had taken him to procure and prepare one of his specially made Nemo Cigars<sup>19</sup> to arrive at the conclusion ; as he snipped off the terminal end with his stogie guillotine ; turned it surgically over the flame of his WWII vintage black-crackle finished Zippo, the battered matte black case of which was carefully incised.

1st of the 79th

Cpl. D.D. Dugan

...with furious anger!<sup>20</sup>

6/‘44, Utah<sup>21</sup>

Once he got dried seaweed tube evenly fired, he took an appreciative puff ; blew the pungent blue smoke up towards the suddenly shocked air filtration system which went into overdrive to deal with the pollutant. He extracted the Nemo from his mouth, and, with a look of utter contentment of his mask, informed his inferior, “I was going to can you, Blesse ; until I realized something.”

She didn’t look at all shocked ; Rusk realized that she was too busy preparing her own bomb drop to be moved by his own deployed ordinance. Will this make me rethink my position?

”Since you show zero interest in my needs, I’m going to get them from that Pierce boy.”

Rusk wasn’t certain if she was castigating him for not being horribly inappropriate with an underling, or if she was being dutiful about reporting herself for being only slightly less so with a mere mortal : it was probably a little bit of both, he realized as his facade-face extended downwards in a almost comedic frown.

Lance Pierce, son of *that* Pierce?<sup>22</sup>”

Blesse nodded with a Germanic seriousness ; Schmidt knew that it was the rebellion of a still completely loyal devotee ; he reversed the frown into a rueful grin.

”He’s almost as important to me as are you, Blesse.” And then he did something to prove it : he explained his rationale to his adopted daughter.

“Preserving the decent son of the single greatest American traitor since Benedict Arnold<sup>23</sup> helps to convince me that I am in possession of an actual moral compass.”

Mollified by her boss' revelation, and equally awakened to the fact that she didn't want to fuck what was essentially her father, Blesse/Blaze returned the worried smile of her vater with one of crystal clear near certainty.

"He's strong enough to deal with what I am ; he already knows on an intuitive level that I am his ; he is mine."

"How properly Wagnerian. As he is my most mentally stable employee<sup>24</sup>, and future protégée ; I trust you to not break him with your liebesspiel<sup>25</sup>."

With the solemn expression of a daughter swearing a sacred oath to her pater familias, Blaze-Blesse once again clicked her heels ; bowed better than a Hessian officer could ever dream of bowing ; formally, and stiltedly intoned, "My attentions will make of him a better man."

As if that actually did settle the matter, Rusk moved on to the two other matter which had been the original reason for the private meeting : Blesse's latest, not quite completely honest acquisitions, the mercenary threesome, B.A.D. Girls Inc.

He drew on the cigar, held the smoke briefly in his mouth ; expelled twin jets of smoke from his nostrils, a contented dragon. He held the tapered torpedo smouldering tip towards the labouring ceiling mounted air cleanser ; watched his lieutenant through the blue curling haze of smoke.

"And your other *personnel*<sup>26</sup> project?"

"If Roxxon hadn't hired them on that very same day that we interviewed Cobalt & Dr. Awesome, they would have already be on our payroll."

Rusk examined the lit end of his smoke ; re-fired it with his war trophy Zippo.

"Are they now?"

"They will be, boss, after they're revived."

Rusk puffed thoughtfully upon his rolled seaweed smoke before he announced, "I want you to be upfront with them ; explain that we held them in orbit to ensure their safety."

Blesse looked unsure. "From what?"

Rusk streamed smoke in an almost exclamation point before he replied, "Why from whatever it is Roxxon's up to in Zu Wendig's jungle that scared three badass women enough to make them bolt, that's what." He rotated the cigar ; puffed ; exhaled. "And given what we now suspect that the Siberian surgical efforts of Herr Kleiser disguised as Frau Sokolov indicate that highly appointed members of business and society may have been surgically altered to change personality, or even perhaps insert entirely different *personalities* altogether. Either way, this Roxxon business is part of a larger plan."

His lieutenant pouted, a peaches and cream hand thumb and forefinger held to her chin.

”A different person, boss? How is that even possible?”

The boss took her form in with a wave of the hand not busy with his incendiary vice ; he replied, “You are not what you present as ; indeed, your reality is almost as...*distinct*<sup>27</sup> as what I have postulated.”

”We’ll have a greater sense of what’s going on once our cypher section cracks the encrypted files the team dug out of Siberia, and Dr. Awesome figures out how the Tunguska Core figures into the larger picture.”

He took a final pull on the stogie ; gently ground the lit tip against the snuff-plate located on the rim of the brass 105 mm artillery shell casing ashtray, another of his wartime relics, before he reverentially placed the cigar within the humidor specifically meant to store partially smoked cigars<sup>28</sup>. This ritual completed, he completed his instructions to the the magically mechanical woman whom was both Chief of Staff & adopted daughter.

His dark eyes glittered with a knowledge which would have dispirited all but a handful of other men and women. He clapped his gloved hands once over his desk, laughed with dark delight ; Blesse felt her insides ignite with the liquid heat of the desire she hoped to later quell with, if not the boss, at least his impending protégée.

”Siberia was a King’s gambit!”

”Boss?”<sup>29</sup>

”It’s the minimum level of awareness required for chess.”

”And that would be?”

”The knowledge that their is an enemy king!”

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<sup>1</sup> Tanya’s the cool, dispassionate Spock pilot except when she’s riled-up by the passionate, knee-jerk Rach-McCoy. Cleo welds them together with the humous Kirk charisma leadership thang.

<sup>2</sup> Seeing as they’re in a lesbian triple (3 person couple), she can’t very well say that it keeps them straight!

<sup>3</sup> There are actually people who believe that the government is secretly commanded by lizard aliens.

<sup>4</sup> The classic Spartan wedge military formation, albeit with the dead minimum woman power of three.

<sup>5</sup> A teleporting dog-beast from D&D. Rach is instructing & GMing the other two in a campaign world best described as Taarna, the Last Taarakian (Heavy Metal : The Movie) crossed with The Wizard of Oz : Cleo’s Dorothy, the Last Taarakian of Oz, wears a whole lot

loss gingham than the original, and what little of it there is gets routinely shredded! Also, yes, the villain of the piece is the glowing green meteoric sphere, Lok’Nar : Whim\_Wham loves the melodramatic madness of the evil little agate!

<sup>6</sup>Cleopatra’s shiny superpower is poison generation which she can apply either with touch—her preferred method—or by bodily fluid, saliva, or if she’s feeling particularly vindictive, sexual excretions. She can specifically dose to subdue, intoxicate, or kill.

<sup>7</sup>Her other less shiny superpower , other than her winning Kirk-risma, is her super-powered ability to instantly assess the perfect defensive & offensive usages of whatever terrain she currently occupies. She quickly becomes aware of why the ground is good, but at first it is made below the level of consciousness. The other two swear by it.

<sup>8</sup> A filmic mutt do-gooder in the doggy tradition of Lassie, Rin-Tin-Tin, and Odie.

<sup>9</sup> One actual battle (the former) of the American Civil War (1861-’65), and a Whim\_Wham one (the latter) in which the Confederate soldiery used the (in)famous Rebel Yell as a fear inducing battle cry.

<sup>10</sup> Built by a hidden subsidiary company of The Rusk Research Group, the former Hammer Industries, rebranded Perigee Systems, builds, amongst other things, the B.A.L.L.S. vehicle. It is popular with the legitimate and illegitimate ultra-rich, and those in very, very risky careers.

<sup>1</sup> In between each distinct reality within the Multiverse is a membranous structure tasked with keeping inter-reality bleed-through below the threshold of chaotic annihilation. The Eidolon exists within this inter-dimensional space in between Earth \_\_\_\_, and the pan-geometric possibilities of multidimensional Quanta-Space.

<sup>12</sup> In place of the Republic of Congo is Whim\_Wham’s Heart of Darkness & Apocalypse Now dual shoutout : in German, Zu Wendig is synonymous with Kurtz which is the name of god-playing central figure of Joseph Conrad’s novella, Heart of Darkness (1896). There will be another trip into this territory to deal with whatever it is that Lizard Roxxon is up to in the jungle depths.

<sup>13</sup> Geo stationary satellites as originally proposed by the American science-fiction author, Arthur C. Clarke, remain orbitally locked over a specifically designated terrestrial region.

<sup>14</sup> Geist-Eisen (German) : Spirit Iron is a major component in the fabrication of a metal golem such as Frau Maschine.

<sup>15</sup>German : Ficken=fuck, wild werden=go wild, mein arsch=my ass.

<sup>16</sup>The border in between Pennsylvania, Maryland & a portion of West Virginia, and Delaware was Blue to the North, Grey to the South.

<sup>17</sup> The swept winged transport straight out of the iconic ‘90s X-Men cartoon. This variant launches shuttle like with a pair of V-3 booster rockets.

<sup>18</sup> The insulating fluid which fills the inter-dimensional buffer in between alternate realities. As it absorbs the energy of attempted crossings, it changes from a neutral calm state to a multicoloured luminous storm of whirlpools, and tornadoes.

<sup>19</sup> Schmidt respects James Mason for his portrayal of Capt. Nemo, and Erwin Rommel.

<sup>20</sup> A dual Samuel Jackson shoutout : Fury-ous anger references his hitman speech in Tarantino's Pulp Fiction (1994).

<sup>21</sup> It's not the State, it's the Normandy D-Day beach.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Redford as Alexander Pierce, Secretary of State (In Whim\_Wham's version, he was a bigger fish than merely SHIELD's secretary to the World Council.) Winter Soldier, sotto-voce (whispered) : "Hail Hydra!"

<sup>23</sup> A trusted American Major-General who defected to the British during the Revolutionary War. A reprehensible cad of the 45 type.

<sup>24</sup> All of the field agents, those met and as of unmet, are all too powerful and oddly talented to not be odd, volatile or nuts in various ways and manners.

<sup>25</sup> German (noun) : love play. Herr Schmidt was being a weird combination of conciliatory & inappropriate with Blesse : poking his nose into something which he could have instantly shut down, but didn't out of consideration for his lieutenant's wellbeing.

<sup>26</sup> He means both *personal*, as in it was Blesse's idea, and *personnel*, as it dealt with her hiring for the AEGIS field team.

<sup>27</sup> Her crazy German Magical-Science golem origin isn't something Whim\_Wham stuffed into Disney : It is part of the canon continuity of Disney's animated show, Gargoyles (1994-97).

<sup>28</sup> The snuff-plate & smoked humidor are Whim\_Wham inventions which, to his cigar knowledge—minimal— do not actually exist.

<sup>29</sup> German (noun) : Boss.

# A Sucker for History

## Chapter Summary

A considerable rewrite of the final portion of the chapter owing to the winsome, annoying charms of Sam Rock...Justin Hammer : the cad has charmed Whim\_Wham.

The rest of the chapter are glimpses at the origins of superpowers, and two of their most famous and infamous early wielders.

June 30, 1908, near the Tunguska River, Yeniseysk Governorate, Russian Empire

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The tops of the taiga forest, the upthrust angular pines and the rounded leafy boughs of spruce and larch were touched by a uneasy combination of the watery rose light of the haze reduced solar disc rising over the forested horizon line, and the sickly light of the more luminous object slashed across the higher darkness not yet touched by the wan dawn light. The spectral blue-white glazed the ribbon of a river which slid lazily through the dense wooded landscape.

This visitor was not what it was designed to resemble, a passing comet named Swift-Tuttle for the two discoverers who, themselves, believed it to be a naturally occurring cometary body. If either of the namesakes had been there that morning in 1908 to safely view their namesakes, unlike the three cosmically unlucky victims of the event, they would have known that it wasn't a natural object at all when it did something no naturally occurring stellar object would ever do.

Brilliant flares of energy radiated from the corona of the comet ; it swung around, the tail swirling sharklike in a long, graceful curve. Dead straight into the upper atmosphere, the already luminous comet became a blinding star which seared down until it exploded high above the endless northern forest with a power which dwarfed the next most powerful explosion which was a long way off from fusing the sands of New Mexico for a project which would be known biblically, Trinity.

The nucleus, an iridescent globoid, which slowly fell away from the three kilometre wide fireball emanated spherical waves of polychromatic radiation which pulsed outwards ; the skywards hemisphere flow of which was redirected<sup>1</sup> to follow the curvature of the sky ; the lower half of the expanding orb of radiation seared into the local earth which glowed briefly with a colour which was not of this Earth. Within the middle of this irradiated, burnt out tract, the heart landed amid the flash destroyed matchsticks of scorched trees, and the boiled away trickle of river where only seconds before, eighty million trees, and a fish laden river had



been in existence for centuries. The tumour splayed in the sky, slowly faded, dark descending tentacles of roiling smoke veined with flame falling away from the central mass.

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May 28, 1918, World War 1, The Battle of Cantigny, Somme, France

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Illuminated by staccato airbursts of orange , and the drifting electric blaze of magnesium flares, the two enemy champions closed range across the crater pocked wasteland in between the trenches. Each moved across the battlefield according to the essence which had been awakened within them by the cometary trigger—not that they, their masters, or anyone was aware of this connexion. At that time, even the originators of the programme were unaware of its activation upon that particular speck of a world amongst the countless worlds & fathomless depths of the Cosmos.

The gaunt whipcord wrapped in gloss black leather duster and topped by a hairless crimson head with a risus sardonicus grin beneath the ruined stub of nose strode with the assured and cynical arrogance of a long established aristocracy ; his opponent, a blue eyed blonde Achilles ran with the vital confidence of a young, clear eyed moral power and assurance. They met in the middle of a landscape as barren as the moon, and the disfigured one began a speech even as his blonde opponent threw a red gauntleted punch aimed at his ruined head which he dodged smoothly, his monologue uninterrupted.

"Kapitan, I'm so pleased to finally meet you in the most honourable of all arenas, battle!"

The response fit the frown of the face half covered by a blue and white star spangled mask :  
"Stow it, Skull!"

"So abrupt, you Amerikaners!" He avoided the wildly telegraphed second punch ; continued, "But I will happily help endow you with the proper martial training to make our next meeting..." He leapt over a powerful, but poorly timed roundhouse kick. "...more of a...."

The purpose of his prattle had one hundred percent of its intended result : the furious novice hero launched a flurry of blows which traded mass quantity for outright power ; a seemingly caught off guard Schmidt staggered back under the fusillade of flying fists with the loudest Germanic gasp of surprise that he could manage. "Mein Gott, you've caught me off guard, Kapiten!" his death's-head grin lost its eyeteeth as he took up a ridiculous defensive pose ; gave himself over to beginning his training regime for his very enthusiastic, very angry, but very halbherzig<sup>2</sup> opponent. Would the lessons take with this Steve Rogers, or would his ensuing 'victory' overawe his capacity to deal with the subtleties Schmidt had built into his battle waltz with the blue eyed blonde American whirlwind? That alone made the whole endeavour worth it to the Prussian noble horribly scarred by the mystically presented variant of the same process which had somehow not 'scientifically'<sup>3</sup> deformed his handsomely aryan opponent.

"I'll give you challenge, NOW, Hun!" He directed a yell over his blue uniformed shoulder, "Charge, boys! CHARGE!"

Up over the muddy walls of the Allied trenches, a rabble, so disorganized and ill formed swarmed which made Schmidt almost forfeit his grand plan of nurturing the enemy into something deserving of his martial talents and heritage.

Fater Odin, are they so Gottdamned<sup>4</sup> inept as to be beyond my help? But even as he thought it, he knew the true strength of his foe : The vigour, the determination, the what was the American word...the GRIT! As he fell back before the onslaught of the American champion, the Rot<sup>5</sup> Skull--he had attached the colour of his withered head to the name his enemy had granted him on the battlefield-- melodramatically called for his own forces to retreat, something which they did with the precision of actually superbly trained, unquestioning soldiers of Germania.

I will have my glorious war even if I have to change Roger's red white & blue windeln<sup>6</sup>, and teach him how to marsch<sup>7</sup>

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February 24, 1943, Kasserine Pass, Tunisia, North Africa

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The oily plumes of destroyed American tanks and trucks littered the rocky yellow ground of the pass. Corpses, blackened and bloated by three days of desert heat, sprawled from the turrets of burnt out tanks, and littered the waterless dust. A column of trucks, each one covered in a desperate clutch of dusty, thirsty, defeated men streamed back towards the safety of Allied lines further back towards Casablanca, Morocco. It was endangered by Panther tanks in a colour scheme the lone standing defender had seen before.

The defiant man unlimbered a captured panzer-Faust rifle-grenade from his quiver of six draped across the torn, singed, and battered red, white and blue of his outfit ; aimed at the lead command tank with its identifying radio antennas, shouted with a voice grated by thirst, "Red Skull, you'll kill no more Americans today!"

From the turret of the Konigstiger<sup>8</sup>, the Red Skull considered his nemesis with a considerably more nuanced attitude than he had granted him all those years, and one World War past. He pointed a black gloved index finger at the American, and replied, "Oh, I think I can manage just one more!" He directed his next utterance down into the turret of his tank : "Hit the meddlesome Amerikaner, and answer to ME! Schießen!"<sup>9</sup> The gunner gasped, "You don't want to kill him?" Eyes the colour of blued gun barrels swivelled to impale the questioning inferior ; the man under that withering look rapidly responded with, "Ja, how close, commander?" The flesh peeled smile widened to reveal glittering wisdom teeth. "Blister his lovely flesh!" The massive bulk of the turret swivelled the fearsome 88 cannon towards the target, and fired as the conical explosive charge surged away from the antitank weapon ; dual explosions clouded both within swirls of mist and debris. The command tank emerged from the smoke, unmarked, but the one behind it to the right, shot deftly through the driver's viewport, exploded ; the turret lifted straight up under a blossom of flame to smash the main cannon directly off of a third machine.

The finger was joined by the rest of the digits in a gloved fist.

"You missed ME, Kapitan!"

Rogers shoulder rolled clear of the incoming tracks of one of remaining four tanks, subtracted it from the equation with a much less demanding shot to the thin armour covering the engine ; a muffled roar sounded from within, and firework spouts of orange flame flared from the viewports, and blasted the top hatch skywards like a discus fit for Thor.

"I don't want you DEAD, Skull! I want YOU..."

Roger's earnestness rescued Schmidt from his unbalancing rage. He laughed aloud, raised the fist in the command to stop the remaining tank formation.

"Oh, it's the manly love, is it, Rogers?"

He leapt nimbly down from his cupola hatch.

"That kind of love requires *closeness*, Steve!"

Steve granted his request.

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Johann remembered that fight. It had been an act of love : furious, in close, sweaty and fought with passion. It was only fighting Steve that he felt sexual. It was a shame that the Amerikaner suffered the Puritan idiocies of his New World ; but it was just like any other one sided never to be relationship, except that this one could have been in between two near-gods. Seated behind his desk, across from the Maschine in her Blaze Tisephone skin & skirt suit, his left hand grazed the impressive inseam bulge ; he shivered.

"Boss?"

"Turn down the air-con, darl'n : Ah'm freez'n ta death."

She knew him far too well ; not so well as to confront him with it.

As she attempted to comply--modern thermostats were confusing!--, she murmured, "Fuck Rogers!"

"What's that?"

"Fuck and bother, boss!" She threw her hands up in exasperation.

"I can fly rockets & jets, but this thing is beyond me!" She smacked the wall mounted unit a little too forcibly ; it crumpled, and fell to the carpeted floor. Maschine stood, in shock, awaiting the ire of her superior. If anything, she was even more surprised by what he actually did.

Dell's laughter was as amused as it was fond : "Fortunately, you excel at those other things!" He lifted the phone receiver on his desk, spoke a few words ; replaced the archaic device back into its cradle.

He aimed his still laughter crinkled blue eyes at his disguised robot underling whose fearful look was replaced by comedic surprise.

"I'm putting you in charge of the recuperation of our newest recruits."

"BAD Girls Incorporated?"

"Add snake charming to your skill set!"

The door to the outer office banged open ; Justin Hammer exploded in with customary oddly bad-boyish charm. He flashed a happy look at Rusk, "Is it your magic metal maid?" He swept his gaze melodramatically to Blaze. "Acting up on you?"

That garnered him all sorts of attention : the robot was shocked ; the boss was impressed."

"I'm what? Ridiculous!"

Rusk leant back in the luxurious leather of his chair, the amused expression tempered by a gleam of appreciation.

Hammer fished a lollipop out of the inner breast pocket of his smart blazer, took a studied pause while he unwrapped the plastic wrapped around the candy bulb ; two sets of very different optical receptors, and expressions watched him as he popped the blue raspberry sphere into the corner of his saucy grin.

"Sure, metallmadchan <sup>9./sup>!" The pop shifted to the other corner of the smile ; the sucker continued, this time to Rusk whose amusement now contained a dangerous edge of consideration in the curl of the lips, and the glint of the blue eyes.</sup>

"I've got all of Herr Rotwang's notes, and thanks to F-Loch, I've collected most of his setup." He removed the candy, twirled it about like a damp magic wand. "I'm really digging the mystic work arounds for those issues I once had!"

Blaze's glare shifted slightly from personal insult to professional worry : "Brain Trust? Did you?"

He bowed, the lollipop leading it with an elaborate flourish. "I did! D'ye want to meet them?"

Before Blaze could respond, Rusk held up a palm turned outwards towards the enthusiastic engineer.

"Later, Hammer." The palm contracted into an index finger pointed towards the ruined room climate control : "Fix that, first ; then we'll meet," he couldn't resist sliding an entertained wink at his put out lieutenant. "your newly minted extended family."

To his credit, Justin Hammer, bent to the menial task with nary a sniff of dissatisfaction : he was in Candy-land. What was the odd routine job but a reminder of exactly how good he had it all of the rest of the time? That's right : nothing at all! He whistled as he worked : a jaunty little Ride of the Valkyries, Blaze cum Blesse realized with annoyance ; Rusk knew it was no longer coincidental. Most surprised of all was Justin himself : Shit, brain, of all of the things to whistle! Guess I'm probably about to die most messily.

In German, Rusk inquired, "How did you know?"

Mentally scrambling to extricate himself from his fuck-up, Hammer decided to play things considerably straighter than he did the previous time he ran afoul of the Establishment<sup>10</sup>, "Yeah, I don't actually speak German, Mr. Schmidt" And then his inveterate bad boy nature intervened ; he couldn't resist adding, even though it might mean his Doom, "...or should I call you, Red...?"

Blaze shot to her feet, a scowl of pure murderous intent drawing the pretty planes of her face down into Satanic rage ; her hands outstretched, presumably to physically tear the life from the clay of Hammer's mortal form ; Rusk froze her with a barked, "Nein, soldat!"<sup>11</sup>

Justin Hammer had swallowed the sucker ; part of his brain wondered if the psychotic mage-science machine would kill him before he choked to death on the blueberry candy. Then, neither happened : the sweet passed properly into his stomach ; the iron voiced command halted the impending murder.

"You know who we are, what I am ; why shouldn't I contain the threat?" The delivery of contain had the finality of another 'c' word, coffin ; Hammer was distinctly aware of the peril. He patted his blazered chest once with an apologetically wry, "If the lollipop doesn't take care of it first."

Rusk reached a manicured finger down to his desk ; toggled the switch labelled, Max Security ; removed his Dell Rusk full head hood : it took a few, very dramatic minutes of horrific skin scalping skull manipulations which the peeler played for maximum effect : Justin Hammer blanched visibly during the performance.

Standing next to him, his lieutenant had also revealed her true mechanical self, albeit with a much cleaner, and far less horrific reveal of shiny, silver self. She simply did not possess the theatrical talents of her chef.<sup>12</sup>

The American accent abandoned, the Red Skull inquired in his native Bavarian accent, "Consider this your final job interview, Herr Hammer." The grin was as huge as it was happily grim.

The immediate danger passed, Justin Hammer found himself exactly within the sort of situation for which he was eminently qualified : he was front & centre, directly underneath the Big Top circus tent ; he spread his feet slightly, could almost feel the sand sliding under his brogues as he started into his spiel.

"I was running a series of diagnostic routines on my drones..."

Blaze interrupted, “*Those* drones?” She scoffed, Germanically.

”Hey, every job is a rush job when you’re working for the government, ba...” He reconsidered finishing ‘babe’ considering just how furious the ‘bot had been mere moments before. “Anyway, I who should barge in but Blaze Tisephone here,” He gestured at her as if she were in the act of busting into his lab at that moment. “And, in her self-absorbed barging passed right in front of the MIST— very clearly warning marked, I might add!—and two very unexpected things happened!” He paused, fished out another lollipop ; both listeners wondered exactly how many of them that he had stowed away within the blazer.

“And those were?” The Red Skull gleamed wryly under the office’s inset ceiling lights.

”Well, the MIST didn’t instantly reduce her to deep-fried beefsteak ; it also produced a complete diagnosis, but for the longest time I thought that three quarters of the data was goner electrons, like real random nonsense, until I broke the unit apart ; rebuilt the Interocitor.”

The silver android head narrowed its alarmingly human eyes at him as the mouth perfectly formed the organic micro movements<sup>13</sup> to form the suspicious, “It was the MIST two seconds ago!”

Hands fiddling out in front of him as if were only now rebuilding the complex diagnostic mechanism, Justin chuckled with only the slightest rasp of annoyance at the robot’s second interruption.

”An Interocitor’s any big, really complicated machine : it’s from a a 1950s mov....”<sup>14</sup>

”Ja, Ja, and you didn’t report this at the time : why?” Johann damn well knew why, but he wanted to see if present Hammer was going to be, as he suspected, completely upfront given his past failures at being the opposite. He was not disappointed.

”I was newly sprung from The Raft, and didn’t have any really savvy yet if I was out of the fire pit and in the skillet, or if, as I now know, I was truly, really, completely rescued : so I laid low, made nothing of it beyond a quiet tip-toed study into what it all meant.”

Schmidt felt satisfaction ; he darkened his impressive death’s head scowl by peeling his lipless mouth back over his final brilliant back molars.

”And where did your studies take you?”

Hammer swallowed nervously at the downturn of the evil, very toothy expression ; continued, “Taking the MIST apart revealed that it was built up around a much older German device, something called Deep Eye—it sounds a lot sexier in German—and the odd data had been generated by its otherwise completely dormant, and not entirely scientifically rational system.”

“So you backtracked the hardware?”

Justin nodded. “Yeah, all the way back to a 1927 German science-fiction movie featuring, guess what?, documentary footage of the creation of a mystical-science fembot!”

“I know the film, Hammer : Metropolis. A work of fancy, no more.”

“Well, I’ve been collecting the laboratory ‘props’ ; it taken me months ; and they’re all as legit as the Deep Eye module. I figure that I can recreate everything but the one special effect they added for the film.”

Maschine, a fascinated light mixed in with the derision of her glare, asked, “And what is that?”

“I can’t magically overlay the robot with the skin of the human consciousness transferred into it by the golem-transference device.”

He gestured at the machine headed Blaze.

“You have the same issue : your skins aren’t magic ; they’re machined .”

The shapely shoulders shrugged under the chromium curve of neck and the round terminus<sup>15</sup> of head.

Hammer popped his purple sucker out of his mouth ; waved it in a little flourished salute at his actual boss, : "Say, why don't you come on down with me to see the magic..." He meant to say room ; his naughty subconscious altered it to a homophone : womb."

Now she's really going to snap me in half. He moodily thought even as his exterior remained bright and optimistic.

The Skull’s rictus and lidless wide stare somehow softened slightly when they turned to the android lieutenant ; Hammer was as surprised by the patriarchal suggestion as he was by the capacity of the skeletal face to be capable of expressing anything but horrific amusement.

”Do you want to go see for yourself, Blesse?”

Blaze Tisephone, once known as Blesse Flammen, smiled a sweet terminator smile at the the engineer while she addressed her boss.

”Not right now, Chief : I couldn’t promise that something might accidentally happen to one of your engineers.” At the final word, the almost human smile blossomed into a toothy grin which would have terrified a roomful of Siberian tigers.

Actually, she was really interested, but she was far too irritated with the person extending the offer. She didn’t really want to kill him, but she really did want to give him a piece of her still very organic mind!

Schmidt nodded his crimson skull, an amused smirk buried within the larger death's head grin. She’s just realized that she’s finally met tthe man who can fully understand her ; it irritates her! Ah, adopted daughter, the first sign of finding your love is they vex you ; you are so vexed with Justin!

Schmidt realized that he was taken enough with the candied rogue to think of him not as Hammer, but as Justin. Does the family grow by one? I believe it may!

Justin, unaware of the depths of his effects & affects upon the other two led a deferential bow with the cherry flavoured flourish of the almost fully reduced bulb of his lollipop.

” Tu castillo es mi castillo!<sup>16</sup> Now I’ve got to get back before Brain Trust converts the water cooler, and my pinball arcade into a giant robot!”

The taut, naked crimson musculature of the skin peeled jaw moved to, "We need to fix our faces first."

"Ja, I mean, sure!" Justin watched the Maschine and the Schmidt slide and smooth their disguises over strange skulls with the practiced external indifference of one who has literally seen it all ; inside he was all a-Squee! as Johann Schmidt, cum the Red Skull, deactivated the über-secure room protocols ; the door behind Hammer swung open with the spooky silence of a haunted house.

Who's seen that and lived? Me, myself and I, baby!

When the door closed behind the eccentric candy munching engineer, the pseudo magical robot rounded on her superior with glowing optics which almost shone through the blue eyes of her blonde disguise.

Tisiphone stamped a foot with a force that she was most careful not to dent or shatter the floor : "Oh, that man!"

A white gloved index wagged playfully in the direction of the frustrated underling.

"Well, hon, he most certainly did get under your skin!"

She chuffed, "Real funny, Boss."

Dell rusk smiled the smile of a joker--not that pale dude : wrong franchise!-- who has landed a joke more truthful than the jokee realizes : it was gently humorous with only the faint sickle of sardonicism at the edges of the lips.

"Be a deah, and fix me a scotch on the rocks : all that gabb'n makes for a powa'ful thirst."

Tisephone, the re-sheathed bombshell blonde, complied with the efficiency of a truly excellent executive assistant.

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On the far side of the door to the inner sanctum, Justin Hammer breathed a sigh of equal parts relief & annoyance.

An epiphany struck him ; he chuckled with the humour of awareness : “Stark and I have always been our own worst enemies ; he’s simply had more friends willing to put up with his



shenanigans!” A spasm flashed across his boyish face as he completed the self awareness with the essential truth of, “He’s also simply much more brilliant than I am.”

He found that he was fine with this as he was now, at least nominally as on the right side of the Law as was Stark--ex Nazi & Kaiser rolling Johann Schmidt possibly excepted-- who ever really knew the full backstory of their boss? His choice of song fragment as he hurried back to his lab--Brain Trust really was a busy bunch!--was either ironic or hopeful of his thoughts on the matter.,/p>

For the times they a-changin'<sup>1</sup>17

*Was Schmidt really ex-Nazi ; could he ever be anything but Nazi? Hammer liked to think so...otherwise he was capitulating with literal Nazis ; that sure as shit wasn't a good look, to put it most mildly, was it, Justy?*

He chose to believe his boss was a changed Skull, and hastened happily back to his workspace. His earlier pinball and water cooler robot joke wasn't completely ridiculous : the still oddly psychically linked minds of Brain Trust had reworked his 1956 Gaggia Internazionale 1 machine<sup>18</sup> into a superior enzyme fermenter to the one he had purchased to provide their protein paste sustenance : as he headed back towards a workplace which felt even more assured and safe than it had before his unconscious had felt the need to test his safety within it.

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<sup>1</sup> But redirected by what : Gravity? Jet Stream? Plot Device? Handwavium? :P

<sup>2</sup> German (adjective) Half-assed, lacking experience & knowhow. In this variant of World War One, the American early battle action was a minor success exactly because the German battle commander, Johann Schmidt engineered what would have otherwise been an American loss--Battle & Capture of Cantigny, France (May 28, 1918)-- akin to the first time they faced the Germans in WW2 at the Kasserine Pass, North Africa (February 18--24, 1943) Why did Schmidt do this? Time will tell!

<sup>3</sup> The individual who created the Super Soldier Project, Abraham Erskine, possessed the innate ability to imbue select others with improved physical capabilities. Not wanting to be viewed as a freak by the Nazis, he disguised it as the Natural Sciences of Shambhala, Tibet to placate the Thule Society (Shambhala & Thule were all actually part of the Nazi mystical research and belief nonsense!). Dr. Erskine, had figured out a way to balance out the super powered aspects of his gift with certain drugs to heal catastrophic disease conditions until one patient, a Nazi zealot turned him in ; he found himself trapped within the Hydra science unit. Herr Schmidt, the boss, quickly figured out the truth of the situation, but disguised it with the Thule trappings of Germanic & Shambhalic myth until the process was very Lord of the Rings with standing stones and the gold ring of Wagnerian opera.

<sup>4</sup> Fater (German, noun) Father ; Gottdamned (German, adj.) Godddamned

<sup>5</sup> German (noun) Red.

<sup>6</sup> German (noun) Nappies, diapers,/p>

<sup>7</sup> German (verb) To walk like a soldier, march

<sup>8</sup> The King Tiger tank, the Tiger 2, which entered the actual war at a much later date ; it's so damn cool Whim\_Wham's put it in Schmidt's arsenal.

<sup>9</sup> Justin's messed up the pronunciation just a tad : 'chan', Japanese for cute, should be pronounced 'chen', as in madchen, German for 'girl'.

<sup>10</sup> The events of Iron Man 2 in which Hammer was way out of his engineering depths ; couldn't deliver the goods all on his own ; got into horrible trouble when he farmed out for Russkie talent.

<sup>11</sup> German: "No, soldier!"

<sup>12</sup> German: Chief, Boss, Don

<sup>13</sup> Sorry, professor Masahiro Mori, there are zero uncanny valley symptoms or signs present either in Maschine's topography, or in her movements both gross and fine motor! She ain't no herky-jerky robot!

<sup>14</sup> This Island Earth. Universal. 1955 It was the ID4 of its day.

<sup>15</sup> Terminus: An extremity of something, in this case the top of a human shaped body ; not to be mistaken for a Terminator.

<sup>16</sup> An inversion of the usual, 'My castle is your castle' : Justin's over cleverly insinuating two things : it's Schmidt's castle ; Justin's

<sup>17</sup> Bob Dylan's The Times They are A-Changin' (1963)

<sup>18</sup> It's an actual Italian espresso machine with a gleaming chromium jet engine shape!

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