

Burning Man

Part 1: The Meet

By: Digital Doom

The flow of manna was burning through him. The power pulsing in his aura. He could feel the power of the world surge through him. It was exhilarating. It was what he wanted more than anything.

Then the power passed. Fleeing from his aura. Unable to hold it any longer he let it go. The feeling of omniscience leaving him, making him feel like a little mouse in a much bigger world. The addiction of the power was quenched for now. He slipped into the black, waiting to reawaken when the power charges back up. For now he must sleep.

Sara was listening to the thrum of the music. The young orc band bashing their way through a ballad she had heard before, Butchering the song. "This is supposed to be a cover for a 1980's rock band? Who let classical music in here anyway?" she asked her partner at the bar.

Her partner was a dwarf who decided to go off of the looks of a yard gnome from a picture he saw in a magazine from back when they were printed on paper. He has a long white beard and braided mustache, curly white hair, and even wears a pair of green overalls and a tall pointy green hat. Right now the hat is sitting on the table next to him, covering his comlink from prying eyes.

"You got a problem with ancient music?" the dwarf asked in a gruff deep voice. One that shouldn't be coming from something so little.

She looked over at him and smiled, "No Dash, I don't. Just wasn't expecting this dreck here."

"It would be better if the band was actually good." he said flatly.

Sara noticed her contact walk into the club, a tall dark elf with black hair and a physic to die for. To say he was attractive was an understatement. She was an attractive elf, but he was gorgeous. "Heads up team, trouble is here." she subvocalized over her coms. Dash got up and walked into the crowd, his pointed hat visible from everywhere in the building. He really doesn't blend in very well.

She heard the distinct sound of four clicks. Two were missing. Before she could enquire about who didn't respond the contact was already approaching her. Dreck, she had to wait and trust her team.

The elf walked over to the bar and asked the bartender something. The bartender looked her way, almost asking if it was ok to send this elf her way. She nodded at the bartender who turned to the elf and pointed to her table.

The man floated his way to the table, not just walked, but seemed to flow through the crowd without any fuss. He reached us and, with a warm, inviting voice asked, "Are you Banshee?"

"I am. You must be Mr. Jones?"

"I am." he reached out his hand to shake, she took it and firmly shook his hand.

"I have the back room slotted for us to use in a few minutes. Until then no business. Have a drink and listen to the dreck for music."

"What, you don't like the classical era? Isn't this an old AC/DC song?" he mused.

"You obviously don't know me." she said shyly. "I play classical music," she patted a black case covered with stickers from lots of really old bands sitting on the seat next to her. "These fraggers are just butchering it."

A round of drinks arrived, ordered by one of her guys, and she took one. She leaned back in her seat and seemed to meditate on the screeching rock song that was out of key and being played way too loud. What she was really doing was sending a message to her team, "Everyone check in. Missed two on last check. Do txt." she sent the text out.

Within seconds she got some replies, "Yacco." "Sprocket" "Dash" She gave it almost a minute and sent another text, "Barney, Ou!! Where are you two?" there was no reply.

"Dreck," she mumbled under her breath.

"Is everything okay?" Mr. Jones asked, looking around worriedly.

"Fine. We have the room in five. Let's start moving back there then we can talk."

To her team she texted, "Yacco you and Sprocket see if you can find Barney and Ou!!! I want their muscle and sword for this run."

"Got it boss lady" the text rolled across her glasses.

She smiled at the elf as she led him back into the back room...

Walking to the table the bartender pointed at he noticed an attractive elven rocker. There was no other way to describe her. Her fine black hair was braided into cornrows, She had piercings all the way up both ears, and her clothes could be described as worn out and ratty jeans and t-shirt with a newer black leather jacket.

He sensed her aura as he walked over to her. She was definitely magical in nature. She was shielding her aura, but he was stronger than she was so he could tell she was a shaman of some sort. Then he noticed the fetishes and focuses that were braided in her hair and attached to her jacket. He also noticed a case next to her that had a faint glow to it on the chair next to her.

This was his first time hiring a Shadowrun team. He hadn't ever been a Pan Kowalski before. He just remembered as he walked up to the table, he was in London. They were called Mr. Jones here. He walked up and greeted the pretty lady, using an English accent when he spoke.

He noticed her checking him out, not asturally but physically. She also seemed distracted. Probably talking to her team on her glasses. He thought to himself, 'I hope this team is up for this job. My fixer said they would be perfect, but I am not convinced with them scrambling on a meet and greet.'

When she got up to move to the back room, he came back to himself, shaking the daydreams out of his head. He smiled and followed his 'guest' to the back room.

This Johnson was obviously new at this, wait. In London they are Mr. Jones. She will never get used to that. They are Mr. Johnson in the UCAS and the CAS. The two countries she normally works out of. Her fixer told her that this was a good deal and she and her team would be a good fit and make them all a lot of New Yen in the process.

She motioned him in the room, walked over to the table and turned on a white noise generator that was sitting on it. She also pushed a red button that was inlaid in the table. A small red light turned on next to the door. From her experience she knew that the tech that made this room unbugable was engaged. Unfortunately it also cut her off from her team.

"Mr. Jones, a friend of ours told us that we needed to hear your offer and that we are perfect for your job. It was the first time that friend has ever told us we would be perfect, so I am intrigued. What is it you have for us?" she asked.

Mr. Jones sat down at the head of the table, pulled out his comlink and plugged it into the cable on the top of the table. No wireless connections would work in this room. At least he knew that much. He pulled up a pic of a young elf with bright red hair and red eyes. He almost like he was burning, a fire aura could even be seen in the hologic that was in front of me.

"Miss Banshee," he started. She couldn't let that one go so I interrupted.

“Banshee, just Banshee.”

He smiled at this, “My apologies, Banshee, This is Mr. Ben Trigger. He was an asset for a major corporation when he decided he wanted to leave the employment of the corp. He just up and left with no plans that anyone could see. His employer, his family, and even corporate competition have all put a price on him, making him a hot commodity. His last known whereabouts has been in London, where he fell out of connection with the Matrix.”

He changed the file to show a matrix view with ISP locators and timestamps.

“24 hours ago he was here,” he zoomed his image into a major train station in downtown London. “Here is where his signal dropped off and he seems to have disappeared from all cameras.”

He pulled up another sheet with data on it. “My employer is offering 200K New Yen for the safe relocation to a place of our choice. If the package cannot be brought in alive, my employer is offering 150K for proof of death. Before I can give you any more information, I need to know if you and your team will take the job.”

She looked at him, and silently did the math. Even if the target was killed they would be paid handsomely. She smiled confidently and said, “You got yourself a team.”

He smiled and put the comlink on the table. “This is now yours then. It will be needed to verify the identity of the package. There are three known look a likes that are always in the city that he is in. This comlink has a DNA snip of his saved to a datafile. With one drop of blood they could verify his identity using his DNA. The digital DNA couldn't be used for ritual casting, but it was a good start.

“Do you have any actual DNA samples? It would be easier if we had a sample we could put a track spell on.” she inquired.

“Unfortunately, no. This file is all I have.” he replied.

“Are you offering any upfront money or any other perks?” she asked. It is always better to get something up front to guarantee something for the job, even if the job fails in the end.

“Alas, the only thing I can offer is one piece of equipment for each of your team members. The equipment will be off of this list,” he opens yet another window with a long list of weapons, equipment, and gear, “and will be available by tomorrow night.”

She hid a smile as she took the comlink. “Is the number to contact you when the job is done on here?”

“It is. There is also another contact, if you get into a situation where there is no way for you to complete either job, retrieval or disposal, then dial it and say ‘Burning Man’ and a team will rush to assist you in containment and cleanup. Only use the second number if all else fails as all loose ends will be eliminated.”

The look in her eyes when he told her that all loose ends would be eliminated told me he had said too much. She knew he had no intention of helping her or her team if they got into trouble. She wouldn’t call that number. He would have to keep track of her and her team to know what they were up to. This would be interesting...

As soon as the meeting was done I called over the teams comlink. “Has anyone found Barney and OU!!! Yet?” Banshee asked quickly. “I need a sitrep for our team.”

Dash’s rough voice came on, “We found Barney, he was unconscious in the back Alley. Not sure how anyone could knock that trog out, but someone did. Ou!!! is still missing.”

Dreck, this isn’t good. Ou!!! is our street sam. We will need his blade for this job. If our Mr. Jones is any indication, this will not be an easy job. “Okay, who is with Barney and where are you?”

Yacco spoke up, “I am with him in the van. I am running scripts to try and get a vid of whoever did this to him. I am currently hacking CCTV cameras in the area to see who it was and to see if I can find our big ugly sword swinger.” Yacco’s icon, an old black and white cartoon character with a giant mallet was talking to me. His icon always made me think he doesn’t take it seriously even though I knew he was one of the best. How else did he get on Digital Doom’s team to update his node?

“Okay, if you find anything let me know, Sprocket is the van ready to go?”

“Yes it is. I also warmed up a few drones if we need them.”

“We just might. Dash, where are you?” she asked.

“Right behind you.” he said out loud causing her to jump. How did this little dwarf that fashions himself a gnome get around so quietly?

“Frag it. You scared the dreck out of me. Okay, what did you find out?”

“Not much. My watcher said that it saw a big aura moving away from Barney. When I tried to get more it seemed to get scared and disappeared. Almost like it was beaten with only enough power to tell me that before it fled back into its realm.”

Dreck. We needed answers. Barney she knew would be alright. He had a hard head. Ou!! Now he is almost impossible to kill, but he wasn't that smart. If he got caught by someone smarter he might be in trouble. He was great in a fight, not so much of thinking, but he was loyal to a fault. That is why he is always on her teams. He wouldn't give up anything.

“Yacco, have you been able to track Ou!!!’s cyberware? I know you installed the tracker after he disappeared that one time.” she was thinking back to a job where he wandered off to learn a new skill without warning the rest of the team. He did come back with some interesting abilities, able to fix his own cyberware, but he was still Ou!!!

“I did. I am now tracking toward it. He is still in this neighborhood, but I haven't gotten it within that yet.”

“Keep working on it. We have a big job and will need his blade when the time comes.”

She started to wonder how she was leading this team. It was Barney's team after all. She was his girlfriend and a teammate, not the number two. That usually fell to Dash. She heard a squawk over the radio, “Boss lady, Barney is coming to.”

“On my way.”

She had gotten to the van just as the door was opening. A very large troll with black, backward sweeping horns and long, thick purple hair stood up out of the side door. The van rocked as he stepped down, his brown duster flapping in the wind. She saw him and smiled.

“Barney, how are you feeling?”

He rubbed his head and pulled out a cigar, “My head is throbbing. Not sure what hit me. Fraggers will die if I get my hand on them.” He lit the cigar and puffed the acidic blue smoke. “How did the meet go?”

“Better than we thought, but harder than promised by our fixer. We will need everyone, and no one knows where Ou!!! is.” she replied. She looked at the dwarf in the back of the van, “Yacco, any word on his location yet?”

“I just pinged him to within this block. It is a weak signal so either in a windowless room or underground. Out here it could be a ghoul, so I am guessing he got distracted and knocked out, then drug underground to be eaten later.”

“That would be funny if we didn’t need him. Not much meat on him. You would think the ghouls would know that after the last time one tried to eat his arm,” she smirked as she talked. “Okay, let’s get the team together and we will go down and get the dreck head.”

He woke up, pain screaming through his head. Darkness so dark his cybereyes didn’t see anything at first. He switched to thermal. He could see he was down in a sewer, again. He could see movement, but nothing warm. Frag it, it must be ghouls again. He really needed a better night vision. Maybe a lowlight vision would be a good investment.

He checked himself, all his gear and weapons were missing, again. Yes this was the second time he was taken by ghouls. Drecks, he would never live this down.

He checked his internal comlink, missed messages from everyone on the team. Voice and text. It looks like he was gone for several hours. This is definitely not good.

He noticed a little movement out of the corner of his eye and turned to face it. Something was sitting in the corner. It wasn’t giving off any real heat so it had to be a ghoul. He prepared to pull out his cyber-spurs when the creature spoke in a raspy almost airless voice, “You are Ou!!!?”

“I am the one and only Ou!!! With three exclamation points.” he said automatically.

“I need to talk with you and your team. That is why we took you.”

At the term we, he started looking around more. He noticed five different human shapes sitting around the tunnel. “What do you want with us?” Ou!!! asked while sliding out his spurs.

“Firsst, you won’t need thosse. We are not here to hurt you.” the rasping voice said, “We only want to talk. There is a great evil awakening and it needsss to be ssstopped.”

“Okay, I will contact my team and tell them not to attack.”

“Fine. Jusst hurry. I need to leave ssoon.”

Ou!!! Sent out a text to his team, ‘I am here’ adding a pin to his map, ‘talking to a ghoul who wants to talk to us all.’

A moment later he got one back from Banshee, ‘Rgr. B there in 5’

“Okay, how the frag did Ou!! get kidnapped by ghouls again. Didn’t we give him money to get his eyes fixed?” Banshee asked exasperated.

Barney responds, "We did. He will have to answer for this."

"Let's get going. Sprocket, stay in the van and roll out your Quadcopter drones." She ordered, then she dropped down into a manhole in the alley beside the club.

The hunger is tearing at my guts. I need to feed soon or I will go farrel. Frag these runners, if I didn't need to talk to them I would eat them.

There, he noticed the heat of the shadowrunners moving down the tunnel. His mouth starts watering. He shakes his head to clear it. "Welcome Bansssee and team. I am George. We need to talk."