

THE DRAGONSLAYERS

written by

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BLACK SCREEN

A woman's voice, quiet, like she's hiding.

DRED
Relax. Relax. I've got this.

A man's voice, panicky.

LEW
They're on my ass, I'm pulling out,
we don't-

DRED
Shut the fuck up. Shut up. I'm
coming in.

Another man's voice, deep, wet.

ALEX
No heroes, remember?

DRED
We don't have time, he's cracking.

LEW
I'm cracking, I really am-

ALEX
If they catch you, we might have
some trouble.

DRED
I know.

LEW
Oh man...

ALEX
And by "have some trouble," I mean
"be murdered by the mob."

DRED
It's too late now. I'm here.

LEW
Oh maaaaan...

Beat.

FADE IN:

INT./EXT. POLICE HOVERCAR - DAY

A flying car, soaring in light traffic around the tops of skyscrapers. Up among the clouds.

Two two COPS inside eye the old junker flying in front of them. The driver is HUMAN; the passenger is three feet tall, and has pointy ears, blue skin, and fangs: a GOBLIN.

GOBLIN COP

So what do we do in this situation?

HUMAN COP

I'm gonna scan his... I'll look at his record.

GOBLIN COP

Do it.

INT./EXT. LEW'S JUNKER - CONTINUOUS

LEW (looks 20) has pointy ears and delicate features - an ELF. He sweats bullets, stares in his rearview mirror at the cops.

LEW

Shit. Fuck.

In his backseat are three sketchy-looking crates. One of them is leaking purple goo.

INT./EXT. POLICE HOVERCAR - CONTINUOUS

A HUD on the windshield beeps and flashes red.

HUMAN COP

Oh man. Okay. So I'm just gonna turn on the lights, and-

CRASH!

A slick yellow hovercar comes from below and bashes into the front of cop car.

GOBLIN COP

WHAT THE FUCK!

The yellow car zips away.

The human cop is too flustered. He doesn't know what to do.

GOBLIN COP (CONT'D)
Go, motherfucker, go!

The goblin smacks the dashboard, and the steering wheel - apparently a hologram - stops displaying in front of the human and reappears in front of him.

He guns it after the yellow car.

INT./EXT. DRED'S HOVERCAR - CONTINUOUS

DRED (30) is short, about 5', but RIPPED; looks like she can bench at least 150. She wears her hair in three braids.

She's laughing like a maniac as she pilots the yellow hovercar.

ALEX (O.S.)
Holy shit, Dred!

DRED
Lew, get fucking moving!

She looks out the window, sees Lew gun it around the traffic and out of sight.

ALEX
What do you think you're doing?

DRED
Call Rufus, tell him I'm cashing in all my favors and he needs to be at Xander Point in about two minutes.

ALEX
You can't get to Xander Point, it's on the other side of the EM grid.

DRED
Alex!

ALEX
I'm on it.

She swerves through traffic, the police hot on her tail, with more already in the distance.

DRED
Hey, Lew?

Beat. She weaves past an oncoming freighter and around a corner, forcing the cops to back off a little.

DRED (CONT'D)

Lew!

LEW

(voice cracking)

I'm here!

DRED

We're never working together again.

LEW

That's fair.

Dred slams on the brakes. The car lurches to a halt.

ALEX

Okay, Rufus says-

DRED

Hang on, Alex.

The cops are right on top of her.

ALEX

Hang on for what? He says-

She presses a button. The radio and all the lights turn off.

The car stops hovering, starts falling.

Dred closes her eyes.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

ALEX, a 7-foot-tall lizardman with an impressive ridge on his head, hunches over a computer screen.

ALEX

Dred? Dred!

He looks at the screen, sees her car falling as broadcast by some news agency.

ALEX (CONT'D)

What the hell?

Beat. The car falls through a blue laser grid.

He laughs.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Cheeky.

Beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Okay. Turn the car back on.

Beat. You can see the ground now.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Dred, turn the car on.

He clenches his desk. She's getting awfully close to the ground.

ALEX (CONT'D)
You're well past the scanners now,
it's safe to TURN THE-

INT./EXT. DRED'S HOVERCAR - CONTINUOUS

Dred's eyes snap open. She slaps a button, the car turns back on - along with the radio.

ALEX (O.S.)
-BACK DAMNED ON!

Dred slams on the gas; the tail of the car scrapes the ground; onlookers gape as she shoots around the buildings and through lower-level traffic - all the cars down here are a lot crummier.

Dred HOWLS in triumph.

ALEX (O.S.) (CONT'D)
By the dark five, Dred, you're
gonna get yourself STOP STOP STOP

Dred SLAMS on the breaks even harder than before; she's not quite able to avoid slamming into the police blockade around the corner.

They FIRE A LIGHTNING CANNON at her car, and it drops to the ground.

CUT TO:

BLACK SCREEN

FADE IN:

INT. SPACE COURT - DAY

A big, empty, futuristic-looking courtroom with the JUDGE appearing as a twenty-foot tall hologram in the center. Dred is chained to the ground; she kneels in front of him.

JUDGE
If you'd just tell us where the artifacts are, we could-

DRED
Suck my dick. Piss in your booze.

The judge sighs.

JUDGE
Alright. Bring him out.

Another hologram, this one life-size: Lew, kneeling in front of Dred.

DRED
(under her breath)
Clouds above.

LEW
I'm sorry, Dred. I really am.

DRED
I know, Lew. Did you get the stuff to Rufus?

He nods. Dred relaxes.

DRED (CONT'D)
Then we're square.

LEW
But they confiscated the cash?

All Dred's tension comes back, and then some.

DRED
What cash?

LEW
The cash. Rufus's payment.

DRED
That wasn't the deal. He was supposed to-

LEW

Dred, you gotta tell them where Rufus put them. They're gonna lock us up, Dred, both of us, forever. It's not worth it.

DRED

You don't get to decide what it's worth!

JUDGE

Regardless, he is correct. I have the authority to throw you both in the oubliette until the artifacts are recovered. Which, without your aid-

DRED

FUCK.

Beat. The judge is startled.

Dred sighs.

DRED (CONT'D)

I invoke the Firstmoot.

The judge throws up his hands, exasperated.

JUDGE

...The Firstmoot.

DRED

(aimed at Lew)

I'd been planning to save that for a while.

(to Judge)

But great-great uncle Winfrith died last month, leaving me fiftieth in line for the Old Throne.

JUDGE

You cannot... You're not...

He can't even right now. His hologram winks out.

Dred smiles, but she's worried.

LEW

What's the Firstmoot?

DRED

Treaty between the Old King and the Federates.

(MORE)

DRED (CONT'D)
 With some very specific diplomatic immunity for those in line for the Throne.

LEW
 You're a dwarf?

DRED
 Half. On my father's side.

LEW
 And a... princess?

DRED
 No. I'm not even a noble. Just a royal.

LEW
 That sounds better than noble.

She chuckles.

DRED
 Maybe to humans.

She considers.

DRED (CONT'D)
 Or elves. Oh, and gnomes. Or-

The judge reappears, this time life-size, somewhere between amused and furious.

JUDGE
 You're Etheldred ov Esmond ov Godiva?

DRED
 ...Ov Godric, ov Godric, ov... Willmar? Ov Old King Leofric. Yeah, that's me.

Beat.

The judge disappears again.

LEW
 So what does that mean for us?

DRED
 For us? Not much. For me? I'm going... "home."

LEW

Wait, Dred, you can't leave me here-

DRED

I can do whatever I want. We're only here because of you in the first place.

Lew freaks out a little.

LEW

But Dred, it's not my fault Rufus-

DRED

No, it's just your fault we're chained up right now.

LEW

Well... ye-

A new hologram replaces Lew, this one a short, stout woman in glasses, with her hair in braids a lot like Dreds': EDELFRID.

EDELFRID

Etheldred ov Esmond ov Godiva ov Godric ov Godric ov Willhard ov Leofric?

Dred mouths "Willhard." Duh.

Beat.

DRED

Oh, uh. That's me.

EDELFRID

You've been remanded into my care. I'll arrive in eighteen hours and twenty-eight minutes. Is that sufficient time to sell your belongings?

DRED

And to pack? Yeah.

EDELFRID

Don't bother packing. Anything you bring will be disposed of.

DRED

Okay, but I have a few heirlooms and pieces from my father-

EDELFRID

Those are property of the throne
and should have been returned to
the throne's care at the moment of
his passing. Someone will be by to
repossess them.

DRED

Wait, you can't-

Edelfrid softens, just for a beat.

EDELFRID

It's a formality. They'll be
remanded into your care as soon
as... as soon as we can decide what
to do with you.

DRED

Oh. Okay. Um...

Edelfrid sterns up again.

EDELFRID

Are we finished?

She shrugs.

DRED

I...

Beat. She groans.

DRED (CONT'D)

I have a handmaiden. Hand... man? I
have a handman.

Edelfrid shakes her head.

EDELFRID

You can't take anyone-

DRED

I don't want to take him with me,
but he's been incarcerated while
under my authority, and I want to
make sure-

Edelfrid grunts, writes something down.

EDELFRID

He'll be taken care of.

She waves her hand, and Dred's chains unlock. Dred stands.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)

A car will be remanded into your care until I arrive.

DRED

A lot of remanding into care, huh?

EDELFRID

Please have your affairs in order in eighteen hours and twenty-seven minutes.

Edelfrid disappears.

Dred rubs her wrists. Looks around. Nobody's here.

DRED

Um...

INT. SPACEPORT - DAY

Heavily used and shows it, but it's actually maintained pretty well. People of all shapes and sizes and species mill about from point A to point B. Some noteworthy vignettes:

- A family of orange-skinned, fanged, hunchbacked ORCS nap on top of each other in a corner.

- A woman whose lower half is a snake struggles to fit her entire tail inside an elevator.

- A dwarf and an elf, both with several bags, argue over a chair.

Dred sits opposite the arguing elf and dwarf. She hunches over a wrist-mounted computer, swearing under her breath.

DRED

Come on. Yes. Yes yes yes-

An error message pops up: ACCOUNT DELETED.

DRED (CONT'D)

Shit.

She leans back in her chair. Tries to relax.

DRED (CONT'D)

There are no logs or warrants, so he wasn't arrested.

A seven-foot tall HOODED FIGURE in a black robe sits in the chair next to her; she doesn't notice.

You can't see his face; it's legitimately spooky, until he speaks. He sounds like your friend's cool dad.

HOODED FIGURE

But you have no way of knowing if we've found him yet. That's rough.

Dred sits up straight. Eyes dead ahead; she can't bring herself to look at him.

DRED

Do you?

HOODED FIGURE

That would be telling. Some think it's better if you don't know.

DRED

So you don't have him.

HOODED FIGURE

Nah, we totally do.

The figure chuckles; he has an endearing laugh.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)

Relax. Seriously, look how tense you are. I'm not going to bite you.

DRED

Not here, at least.

HOODED FIGURE

Hopefully not anywhere. Gods' Maw, kid, we saw what happened. You failed miserably, but it's not like you're stiffing us on purpose.

Dred finally looks at him.

DRED

(sarcastic)

So we're square?

The figure laughs again.

HOODED FIGURE

Obviously not. I'm just saying intent matters. For example, if you were to use your connections to get out of jail so you could find a way to repay us, we'd have one reaction.

(MORE)

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)
Whereas, if you were intending to
run away from your debts and live
the rest of your life under the
dwarves' protection, we'd have
another.

 DRED
Does it matter? If you can't reach
me there, and I never leave-

 HOODED FIGURE
Then what would happen to poor
Alex? I bet he'd really miss you.

 DRED
Fuck you.

The hooded figure shrugs.

 HOODED FIGURE
Just thinking out loud. We're
really gonna miss seeing you
around, Etheldred. Stay in touch.

The figure stands.

 HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)
For what it's worth, I, personally,
have a lot of faith in you. Even
when you fail, you fail big. I
respect that.

Dred looks away, but... it is actually a little nice to hear.

The hooded figure walks away, brushing past Edelfrid as she
arrives.

 HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)
Excuse me.

Edelfrid stands next to Dred, watches the figure go.

 EDELFRID
You run in... unseemly circles.

Dred looks to see who was talking; she's a little startled to
see Edelfrid, and jumps to her feet.

 DRED
What?

EDELFRID

I already wasn't thrilled at the Firstmoot being used to get out of prison. But running from gambling debts, too?

DRED

I don't gamble. And I'm not running from anything. But I need to-

EDELFRID

I don't want to know. Truly.

Beat. Dred hesitates.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)

Goodness. Fine. Tell me on the way.

Edelfrid leads Dred away.

INT. LUXURY CABIN - SPACE

EDELFRID

Absolutely not.

The cabin is the size of a small apartment. One wall is a massive forcefield-window showing the blackness of space. The walls are gold and the furniture is covered in silk.

Dred paces around the room, toys with her braids.

Edelfrid sits at a small desk with a tablet and a stein of something blue and bubbly. She rubs her eyes, exasperated.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)

You do not get to dip into the royal treasury for personal expenses. We wouldn't pay off your debts if you personally were in danger, much less a friend of yours.

DRED

Alex is not just a friend! When my dad died, he-

Edelfrid holds up a hand.

EDELFRID

You weren't listening. His relationship to you is immaterial.

DRED

Okay. You won't pay off my debts, that's fine, I get it. But he's in danger, and-

EDELFRID

No. Were he in Dwarven space... well, it'd still be unlikely. But we are certainly not launching a rescue operation in Federation space.

Dred yells, frustrated.

DRED

So what am I supposed to do?

EDELFRID

I'd suggest finding a way to pay them back. Your mother is still a rather successful art dealer, is she not? You could-

Dred's jaw clenches. She looks sad.

DRED

Burned that bridge.

Edelfrid notices the change in demeanor.

EDELFRID

Ah.

Edelfrid leans back in her chair. Her tone softens.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)

It feels pertinent to reassure you that your... heritage in no way affects your standing with the Throne. In fact, the current Eighth-in-Line is a half-human as well, and is serving as Second Minister of-

DRED

I get it. Thanks, but that's not... thanks.

Edelfrid nods, turns back to her tablet.

Dred collapses on a chair. She's too tired to keep freaking out.

DRED (CONT'D)
 What if I just can't?

Edelfrid realizes she's not going to get any more work done for the time being. She flips the tablet over, gets up, sits facing Dred.

DRED (CONT'D)
 Like, really though. I don't bring a lot to the table. Even... extra-legally, I'm leaving the few favors I had left to my name back in the Federates.

EDELFRID
 Defeatism is unfitting of royalty. I have every confidence we'll be able to find a way for you to repay your debts and save your friend.

DRED
 I don't think you understand how much I owe.

EDELFRID
 Oh-point-nine GCs, four thousand Federation denii, and sixteen grams of stardust, for a total approximate value of fifty-four Dwarven kilodenii.

Dred's surprised.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
 What did you think I was sitting at my desk doing?

DRED
 I don't know. Bureaucrat stuff?

Edelfrid snorts.

EDELFRID
 Get some sleep. The flight is short; we'll finish discussing this at my office, where we can actually be comfortable.

She stands, stretches. Dred looks around the room; this isn't comfortable?

DRED
 Do you really think I can do this? Save him, I mean?

Edelfrid sighs, looks at her.

EDELFRID
Honestly?

Dred nods.

Edelfrid takes off her glasses, cleans them.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
It's unlikely. And you should start
working on accepting that. But
we'll do what we can.

Edelfrid puts her glasses back on.

She walks to a door, slides it open.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
Try to rest.

Dred just stares forward.

DRED
Yeah.

Edelfrid leaves.

Beat.

A long beat.

Dred stands up with purpose, strides offscreen towards the desk.

The stars out the window whizz by; time passes.

INT. LUXURY CABIN - LATER

Edelfrid steps out of her room, new clothes on.

EDELFRID
How did you slee...

She sees Dred, hunched over the tablet on the desk. Half a dozen holodisplays float around her, showing various charts, graphs, and a blurry view of a golden planet.

It's not immediately obvious, but Dred is asleep.

Edelfrid walks over.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
Somebody's been busy. Did you get
any rest at all?

Edelfrid examines the charts and graphs. Her eyes bug out of
her head.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
You can't be serious.

She looks at Dred. Realizes she's asleep.

Edelfrid waves her hands, closes all the holodisplays.

Dred wakes up, sees what she's doing.

DRED
No, no wait!

EDELFRID
You don't even have a ship.

DRED
But you do. You could remand one
into my care, right?

Edelfrid laughs.

EDELFRID
I'm not throwing away royal
resources so you can commit suicide
in spectacular fashion.

DRED
It's not suicide. I do this right,
there's barely even any risk.

Edelfrid gives her a look.

DRED (CONT'D)
There's... there is a lot of risk.
But all within reasonable levels,
considering the payoff.

Edelfrid presses something on the tablet. The holodisplays
reappear. She examines them.

EDELFRID
Just now, I see a dozen reasons it
can't be done.

DRED
I see a dozen obstacles to
overcome. But, uh...

Dred examines the displays Edelfrid is looking at.

DRED (CONT'D)
Just to be clear, what are the
obstacles I see?

EDELFRID
You'd need an army. An entire
legion wouldn't be enough.

DRED
I'd need...

She looks at the displays, counts in her head.

DRED (CONT'D)
...Four men. Including me. So three
more.

Edelfrid raises her eyebrows. Looks at Dred.

EDELFRID
Okay. Talk me through it. What's
the plan?

DRED
What?

EDELFRID
Sell me on it.

DRED
Okay. Okay. Sure. Look here:

EXT. SPACE

The starry void.

DRED (O.S.)
My parents told me stories about
Jushurka when I was just a kid. Big
art collector legend.

A wall of... distortion. Everything on the other side is
weird and hazy.

DRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Surrounded by a constant gravity
storm, so nobody can get in or out.

Through the storm, a solar system around a dim star. Shapes
move around several of the planets.

DRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Inside the storm, countless drakkennests, so even if you did get in, you'd have to fight off endless swarms.

Closer, you can make out the shapes: millions of snakelike DRAKES, each the size of a skyscraper.

Past the swarms, a golden planet, shining peaks and silver seas. Plenty of mean-looking mines and insect-like robot-ships orbit it.

DRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Then, of course, the planet itself has top-of-the-line security. I'm talking drones, cannons, mines. But oh, once you're past that?

In on the planet. It's simply littered with gold and jewels, and that's not even the valuable part. There are massive buildings covered and filled with art of all sorts. Paintings, sculptures, art installations.

DRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Gold beyond imagining, sure, but entire cities filled with ancient treasures. The greatest works of all the great masters. I'm talking paintings, sculptures, movies, books...

A library the size of Manhattan, all first editions.

DRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)

A backpack full of stuff, and you could live better than the Old King himself. A frigate, and your great-times-ten grandchildren would.

Zoom out to another global view of the planet.

EDELFRID (O.S.)

Not only have you failed to mention anything about any plan to get past the obstacles you mentioned, you didn't say anything about the one obstacle worth mentioning.

DRED (O.S.)

What, Jushur himself? He's been asleep for millenia. Honestly, he's probably dead.

As the planet rotates, we see a long shape, the size of a moon. It's a living being, a dragon: JUSHUR.

INT. EDELFRID'S OFFICE - DAY

"Grand" doesn't begin to do it justice. A massive room of hewn stone, with rugs and tapestries as thick as your fist. Natural, uncut gems run through the walls in spectacular veins.

Edelfrid sits at a desk fit for a king; Dred sits on the desk.

EDELFRID

I am unconvinced.

DRED

I can fly through the storm.

EDELFRID

You cannot.

DRED

(ignoring her)

Give me a wizard who can cloak the ship enough to get past the swarm...

EDELFRID

You can't cloak something that large.

DRED

...A hacker who can get through the planet's security system...

EDELFRID

You can't just "hack" a planet's security system, it's too broad.

DRED

...And someone strong to lug everything to the ship...

EDELFRID

That is doable.

DRED

...and we can handle it, no problem. In and out, don't even need to bring any weapons.

Beat. Off Edelfrid's unconvinced face:

DRED (CONT'D)

We will, though. Lots. Can't be too careful.

EDELFRID

Of course.

Beat.

DRED

Like I said, I know it's risky-

EDELFRID

No. It is not risky. Risky implies there's a chance of success.

DRED

Okay, even if it's low, you can't say there's zero chance for success.

EDELFRID

I can. You're asking the impossible. And even if you could find a mage capable of cloaking an entire ship against drakes, and someone capable of hacking a planet, they would have to be willing to face the absurdly high chance of death on this mission.

DRED

So what you're saying is-

EDELFRID

That we need to look at something realistic.

DRED

-That if I can find the crew, you'll get me the supplies we need?

Edelfrid looks at her. She's dead serious.

EDELFRID

I'm trying to help you, Dred. I'm on your team. We'd have better odds just buying lottery tickets.

DRED

Not at all. Look at a cost/benefit. If we had a one percent chance of success, and you had a one percent stake in the venture-

EDELFRID
I would certainly not accept-

DRED
-Then, if we succeed, you still get
back, like, ten thousand times your
investment.

Edelfrid sighs, calculates in her head.

EDELFRID
Don't be stupid. It'd be...

Oh.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
More like fifty thousand.

She realizes the amount of money they're talking about.

DRED
And that's just a one percent
stake. You'd obviously get at
least...

DRED (CONT'D)	EDELFRID
...Five percent.	Fifty percent.

They stare each other down for a beat.

DRED (CONT'D)
I said at least. And either way,
still better odds than the lottery.

EDELFRID
Assuming you actually have a one
percent chance of success.

DRED
You still win if I have point-oh-
one percent chance. Which you don't
think I'd have because you don't
think I can find the crew. But if I
did...

Beat. Edelfrid sighs.

EDELFRID
...Fine. It's your friend whose
life we're trying to save. If you
want to waste time on this, then
yes. If you get the crew, I will
get you the ship and whatever other
supplies you need.

Dred starts to celebrate and leave.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
 BUT. I need to be convinced. I
 don't want some hedge wizard or a
 wannabe hacker.

DRED
 Of course. Yeah.

She turns to leave, hesitates. Turns back around.

DRED (CONT'D)
 One quick favor first. I need a
 phone number.

INT. ATMOSPHERIC OFFICE - SUNSET

The office is completely empty. Just floor-to-ceiling windows
 looking out over the clouds.

The hooded figure stands staring out at the view.

A CHIRP.

HOODED FIGURE
 Etheldred? So soon? I'm impressed.

DRED (O.S.)
 I've got something big. Like,
 stupidly big. Enough to pay you
 back ten times over and not care
 about it.

The figure cocks his head.

DRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 I know it sounds crazy, and it kind
 of is, but you've got to trust me.
 I don't know how I can-

HOODED FIGURE
 Okay. I believe you.

DRED (O.S.)
 ...Really? O-okay.

HOODED FIGURE
 You need something from us?

DRED
 Not something. Someone.

ALEX

What are you doing here? Well, not "here," but...

DRED

I need your help with something.

ALEX

They've got me locked up in a little basement here. Can only use the terminal with a chaperone. Not sure how much help I can be.

HOODED FIGURE

If you agree to help her, you'll get full access.

ALEX

Why the hell wouldn't I agree to help her?

The hooded figure laughs.

HOODED FIGURE

Because she's insane.

DRED

It'll work.

HOODED FIGURE

Hey, if anyone can do it, you can. But anyone who's willing to try is completely nuts.

ALEX

What's the job?

DRED

Just listen. I know you never took it seriously, but I was dead serious the entire time.

Alex stands. Shakes his head.

ALEX

Oh, no. No no no. Do not say what I think you're going to say.

DRED

This is our best shot at getting you out of there.

ALEX
We were drunk half the time it came
up, and high the other half.

DRED
It'll work, Alex.

ALEX
Oh, hell.

DRED
We're gonna rob Jushur.

Beat. He shakes his head, already defeated.

ALEX
I've got a couple ideas on who to
talk to.

DRED
YES.

HOODED FIGURE
Okay then! Looks like we're in
business.

ALEX
Give me a few hours.

HOODED FIGURE
This is great! I'm pumped! You guys
pumped?

DRED
So pumped!

Alex waves them off, sits at the terminal.

DRED (CONT'D)
Who's up first?

INT. CLASSY BAR - DAY

The bar is made out of one solid piece of marble. Turquoise
tiles decorate the pillars. Classy shit.

ALEX (V.O.)
I'm gonna send you to Franklin.
You're not gonna like what you see,
but bear with him.

Most of the clientele are as classy as the bar. But not
FRANKLIN.

Franklin is a human, mid 40s, in a dirty jacket, jeans, and muddy combat boots. He cuts his own hair, and he's not very good at it.

ALEX

Franklin's a war hero - or, uh,
criminal, depending on your team.
Guy's a savant.

EXT. WARZONE - DAY

Rocky crags, bullets, and explosions.

Franklin shoots lightning from his fingertips, defending a few dozen wounded men from a whole unit of murderbots.

ALEX (V.O.)

I only met him in person once, but
when I did I watched him single-
handedly levitate a class-4
cruiser.

An enemy gunship flies overhead; Franklin waves his hand, and a shimmering veil covers everything.

Now, to the gunship, Franklin and all his men look like robots, and the robots look like his men.

The gunship fires on what it doesn't realize is its own team, wipes out all of the robots.

Franklin lights a cigar off a smoldering robot. Steps on its head.

INT. CLASSY BAR - DAY

Dred sits next to Franklin at the bar, already deep into her explanation and pitch.

ALEX (V.O.)

He's not technically a mercenary,
but when he sees the amount of
money we're offering-

Franklin LAUGHS, a big booming laugh.

DRED

No, hear me out.

Franklin just laughs harder.

DRED (CONT'D)

We can pull this off, it's not-

Franklin turns his back to her. A nearby security guard gives her a dirty look. Dred walks away.

ALEX (V.O.)

...Okay. No big deal. He was a hack anyway. Let's see...

Beat. Franklin's still laughing.

ALEX (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Rumor has it Swithin is in the Dwarven systems right now.

INT. TECHED-OUT WAREHOUSE

The walls are lined with sophisticated machinery. At the center of it is SWITHIN, an elf. He looks about 25, blonde hair, pale like he tried sunlight once, then decided it wasn't for him.

He wears a very distinctive smartwatch, big and bulky, takes up his entire wrist and then some.

ALEX (V.O.)

You may not have heard of him, but in tech circles, he's practically a god.

ZORION stands next Swithin; a glowing woman who looks like she's made out of light.

ALEX (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He's got a Dryad assistant tied to a centuries-old gaming watch he salvaged.

INT. WARSHIP BRIDGE - SPACE

A massive bridge, at least fifty insect-people manning stations. They're in the middle of a massive battle, and they're winning.

ALEX (V.O.)

Even without her, though, the guy invented the Asgard OS before he hit puberty. Which, yeah, comes late for an elf, but still.

In a flash, all the lights on the ship turn up to 11. It's blinding. Warning sirens are going off, everyone's panicking.

ALEX (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Rumor has it they're the ones responsible for the whiteout that took down the Zil revolt.

The terminals spark and ignite into flames.

ALEX (V.O.) (CONT'D)
No way to know for sure, though.

The ship explodes.

INT. TECHED-OUT WAREHOUSE - DAY

Dred, in hologram form, entreats Swithin. Zorion paces around the room, ignoring Dred in favor of the computer displays.

SWITHIN
I don't know, this seems a little... suicidey.

DRED
It's risky, but it's not crazy. With the right crew, the odds are in our favor.

SWITHIN
"In our favor" meaning, what, fifty-one percent? Fifty point oh oh one percent?

DRED
Something as profitable as this is never going to be a hundred percent certain, but-

Zorion flicks her wrist, and Dred disappears.

ZORION
Come look at this.

Swithin doesn't miss a beat, just wheels his chair over towards Zorion.

ALEX (V.O.)
Okay, it sucks, but it's to be expected, the guy's a legend. It was a pipe dream anyway. This next guy is-

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY

Dred at a park playing a chess-like game against a dwarf in a stereotypical pointy wizard's hat.

DRED
No, I'm serious.

The dwarf stares at her. Starts laughing. Guffawing.

Dred sighs, makes a chess move and walks away. The dwarf stops laughing, stares at the board.

ALEX (V.O.)
Don't worry about him, Puratech is
always looking to invest in-

INT. BOARD ROOM - NIGHT

Dred is a hologram at a business's board meeting.

One of the boardmembers turns off the hologram. They all look at each other and laugh.

INT. DRED'S ROOM - MORE OR LESS CONTINUOUS

Dred stands in front of a holodisplay: CONNECTION TERMINATED.

DRED
Fuck you.

She gestures towards a nearby chair. It wheels over and she collapses into it.

Her room is utilitarian - no windows, holodisplay on one wall, bed in the corner. She's sitting in the only chair. The only ornamentation is a large postmodern painting on the wall above her bed.

She spins in the chair, faces the painting.

Stares for a beat.

DRED (CONT'D)
We're going about this wrong.

Alex appears on the display behind her.

ALEX
What do you mean?

DRED

We're looking for experts and asking if they're crazy enough to do something like this. We should be looking for lunatics and asking if they're talented enough to do something like this.

ALEX

I can think of one downside to that.

Dred shakes her head, spins around to face him.

DRED

No. They were always going to have to be insane.

Alex... CLICKS? It seems to be a sound like a sigh for him.

ALEX

Okay. I've been sitting on this one.

Dred looks excited.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Don't- don't make that face until you've met her.

She's still making the face.

DRED

Why? She eat babies?

ALEX

That was ONE TIME, and I had no way of knowing he had eaten- NO. She does not eat babies.

DRED

Then let's give it a shot.

INT. FIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

A huge ring surrounded by an electric net, with a bloodthirsty crowd chanting and cheering.

Inside, a goblin woman wearing a leather cloak like something from the Matrix: JOHANNA. She shoots jets of fire from her fingertips at a dwarf with a machine gun.

The dwarf has some sort of force field, it repels the flames. He unloads at Johanna, who STOMPS her foot and is suddenly behind him.

The dwarf looks around for her, but she stays behind him, snickering.

Johanna performs a series of gestures. The dwarf sees her just as she finishes.

He raises his gun, but she flicks her wrist and he's INCINERATED BY A TOWER OF FLAMES.

The crowd goes NUTS, as Johanna cackles maniacally.

The flames disappear, revealing the dwarf alive, but charred, curled up on the ground.

Dred watches from the audience, uncertain.

DRED

This is... she's definitely crazy.

Johanna kicks the dwarf out through a gap in the electric mesh, playing the crowd the whole time.

ALEX (O.S.)

And talented. Or something like it. She's got so many bootleg spells in her system it's like a self-sustaining ecosystem of viruses. Most genius wizards have a library about half the size of hers.

Dred sighs.

DRED

Okay. I'll talk to her.

Johanna struts around the ring.

JOHANNA

Who else wants some of what I'm selling? Huh?

Nobody bites.

CUT TO:

Johanna sits with a glass of something strong, enjoying herself. There are several empty stools on either side of her.

Dred sits next to her. Johanna doesn't like that.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
I'll count to one. When I get
there, you'd better-

DRED
I have a proposition for you. A
job.

JOHANNA
Don't need a job.

Johanna starts twiddling her fingers. Prepping a spell. Dred notices.

DRED
More money than you could spend in
an elf's lifetime.

JOHANNA
Don't need money. I'm gonna start
counting now.

DRED
What do you need?

JOHANNA
Nothing. One.

Johanna snaps. Dred is THROWN BACKWARDS straight into a table, breaking the table in half.

Dred stumbles to her feet.

ALEX (O.S.)
Okay. I've got another lead in the
city, maybe an hour-

DRED
I'm not done yet.

She cracks her neck.

Sits next to Johanna again.

DRED (CONT'D)
You familiar with Jushur?

SNAP. Thrown back again; this time she SLAMS into the wall.

Dred clambers to all fours. Coughs up a little puke.
Struggles to stand.

DRED (CONT'D)
Thyr's pubes.

ALEX (O.S.)
Let's leave this one.

Dred gets to her feet.

Sits next to Johanna again.

DRED
Stellar dragon, planet full of
treasure?

Johanna is about to snap, but Dred STICKS A KNIFE through
Johanna's hand, nails it to the bar.

DRED (CONT'D)
None of that's interesting enough
to let me finish a thought? Screw
you.

Johanna blanches, caught off-guard by the pain.

Dred stands, turns around, back to Johanna. Fiddles with a
holo on her wrist.

Johanna looks at Dred, confused and angry and...

Amused. She starts laughing.

Her other hand IGNITES with lightning and fire.

JOHANNA
That was a mistake.

Dred looks back over her shoulder.

DRED
How big can you get a cloaking
field?

Johanna pulls back her burning hand, readying a big ol' blast
of something.

Dred SPINS AROUND HER BACK, and STABS JOHANNA'S OTHER HAND TO
THE UNDERSIDE OF THE BAR.

Johanna gasps in surprise and pain again. Dred chills there,
back to back with Johanna.

DRED (CONT'D)
I have more knives.

Johanna bites her tongue. Snarls.

Yields.

JOHANNA
In atmo, or in the void?

DRED
Does it matter?

JOHANNA
(fuck you)
Yes.

Dred sits back down next to Johanna.

DRED
Void.

JOHANNA
I could cloak a planet if I had the
time.

DRED
You can't cloak a planet.

JOHANNA
You can't cloak a planet.

Dred looks at her with something between respect and
disbelief.

DRED
How long would you need for a
freighter? Think D-class.

Johanna stares at Dred; contemplates all the things she'll do
to her once she gets a hand free.

JOHANNA
Two years of prep. About a week to
start it once that's done.

DRED
Not good enough.

JOHANNA
Excuse me?

DRED
You'd have about three months of
prep, less if I'm lucky.

JOHANNA
You can't cloak a D-class with
three months of prep.

DRED
You can't.

She gets up, walks away.

Johanna tries to tug her hands free; winces.

JOHANNA
Hey!

Dred stops, turns around.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
How long if you aren't lucky?

Dred smiles, just a little.

DRED
Five months, tops.

Johanna shakes her head.

JOHANNA
Bullshit.

DRED
That's what people keep saying.

She turns around to leave.

JOHANNA
Five months of work, anyone within
two megs would see right through
it.

Dred stops.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
And even that's only if you're
crawling, no more than a hundred
kips.

Dred turns around.

DRED
A hundred kips would get you from
here to the edge of the system in,
what, four days?

JOHANNA

I look like a calculator?

Dred smiles wide. Walks closer.

DRED

So with five months, you could cloak us against anything more than two megameters away, as long as we stayed under a hundred kips?

Johanna isn't sure if she's still angry, or if she's interested now.

JOHANNA

What are you trying to do? Two megs, any planetary defense system will get you. It'd get you past solar defenses, but at a hundred kips, you're not doing anything interstellar. You said something about Jushurka?

Dred nods.

DRED

We're gonna rob Jushur.

Johanna considers, honestly considers, but shakes her head.

JOHANNA

I couldn't cloak you onto the planet. Nobody could, not in five months. Not in five years.

DRED

But you could get us to the planet.

JOHANNA

I told you, we couldn't go fast enough to... Does he have a solar defense network?

Dred sits next to Johanna again.

DRED

Nope. Just a grav storm that surrounds the whole system.

Johanna reconsiders. This is interesting.

JOHANNA

Well, shit. That's enough to keep everybody out. But if it wasn't...
(MORE)

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
 yeah, I could get you to the
 planet.

Dred takes the knife out of Johanna's closest hand. Johanna hisses, pulls out the other knife.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
 What's your plan for the storm? And
 landing?

Dred smiles.

INT. SHIPYARD - SPACE

Massive doesn't begin to do it justice. You can only see the wall near the door; it stretches off so far, the other walls are too far away to make out. Inside are ships ranging from individual craft up to massive colony vessels that could fit millions of people.

Dred, who just entered, is awed by the scale. Alex is a tiny hologram on her wrist.

DRED
 Never really get used to this.

ALEX
 I don't like it. It's unnerving.

The place is mostly automated; flying bots whirring around in every direction, working on the ships, painting them, disassembling, reassembling.

Two spherical bots hover up next to Dred. She holds up a finger: "Wait."

DRED
 (to Alex)
 So who are we here for?

ALEX
 I... you're not gonna like it.

DRED
 I didn't like Johanna, but she'll
 do the job. This is our hacker,
 yeah?

ALEX
 ...No.

DRED
 Porter? Do we really need-

A voice comes from one of the spherebots.

AGRIPPA
Etheldred. Ov. Esmond.

Understanding and anger slowly wash over Dred. She glares at the bot, but keeps talking to Alex.

DRED
You son of a bitch.

AGRIPPA
Seriously? You come into my house,
and the first thing you say to me-

DRED
Not you. Alex.

The voice is suddenly bright and chipper.

AGRIPPA
Oh, how is he?

DRED
Imprisoned by the Black Marks
pending repayment of some debts.

AGRIPPA
Oh, no! Is there anything I can do
to help?

DRED
No.

She turns around.

Alex's hologram grows to half life-size, faces the bots.

ALEX
Hey, Agrippa.

The speaking bot moves closer to the hologram.

AGRIPPA
I told you she was trouble.

Dred stands still, frustrated, but willing to let them talk.

ALEX
It wasn't her fault. Honestly, if
not for her, I would've been here
years ago.

The bot shifts to look at Dred, then back at Alex.

AGRIPPA

I find that difficult to believe.
Do you want to talk in my office?

ALEX

That would be nice.
(to Dred)
Wouldn't it?

Dred bites her tongue.

INT. AGRIPPA'S OFFICE - SPACE

Stainless steel everything. Lots of holodisplays, more than one person should be able to use at once.

Sitting in the center of them all, though, is not a person: it's a seven-foot-tall humanoid robot with five arms. This is AGRIPPA, a GNOME.

Dred stands in front of Agrippa's desk, a full holo of Alex beside her.

AGRIPPA

So what have you been up to? It's been, what, six years?

DRED

Do I really need to be here for this?

ALEX

Dred. We're asking for his help.

AGRIPPA

Are you? That's a bit surprising.

DRED

We don't need a pilot.

ALEX

You're going to fly a class-six freighter through a grav storm?

DRED

Yes!

AGRIPPA

Class six? Why? Why? What are you planning?

DRED

It doesn't matter, you're not needed.

Agrippa laughs.

AGRIPPA

Because you're going to do it? Have you even piloted a freighter before?

DRED

I have.

AGRIPPA

Then you know how different they are than your little grav surfers.

DRED

I can handle it.

AGRIPPA

No, you really can't. Now explain to me why I should.

ALEX

We're plundering Jushurka.

AGRIPPA

No kidding?

He nods at Dred.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

You've been working on this one for a long time, haven't you?

Dred sighs; his friendliness is making her feel bad.

DRED

I have. Which is why I know I can handle it.

Agrippa looks at his displays. Dozens of fingers start flying across keys and buttons, working on something inscrutable.

AGRIPPA

Do you need a ship, too?

ALEX

Yes, but the Dwarfthrone is supplying it.

AGRIPPA
(still not looking)
Dwarfthrone? So it's finally
happened? You're a ward of the
state?

DRED
That's not... but yes.

AGRIPPA
Regardless, I have to insist.
They're going to put you in
something fast and durable and
singularity-based because those are
the three most valuable traits in a
freighter, but for a job like this
we'll need-

DRED
No. No! I'm sorry, but Alex didn't
tell me where I was going. If I'd
known-

AGRIPPA
Relax. We're all friends here.

Dred just looks confused.

DRED
Are we? The last time I saw you,
you had some pretty specific
thoughts to share about my
leadership.

AGRIPPA
And I stand by them. But a job like
this is exactly what I need right
now.

DRED
A suicide mission?

Even Alex looks skeptical now.

AGRIPPA
You don't do suicide missions.
"Heroes don't come home," right?

DRED
Yeah, but-

AGRIPPA

Then let's do it. I've already got a ship in stock that'll be perfect with some retrofitting. When are you hoping to be ready by?

ALEX

Agrippa, are you okay?

AGRIPPA

You guys are still trapped in your meat bodies, with meat ways of thinking. I promise you, I'm on board. I just... I miss you.

Alex looks at Dred.

ALEX

I don't know about this.

DRED

No shit.

ALEX

Agrippa, I knew you'd be willing, but this is... very eager.

Dred gets a "You motherfucker" face.

DRED

He thinks we're wrong.

Agrippa doesn't stop working, but he does hesitate for a beat.

DRED (CONT'D)

He thinks we're going to die.

Alex snarls, looks at Agrippa.

ALEX

You were going to send a drone. Or make a backup here or something.

AGRIPPA

You know we haven't cracked full transcendence yet. I'll be there, actually and truly.

ALEX

Then what?

Agrippa stops. The screens dim. He stares at them.

AGRIPPA

I do think you're overestimating
your odds.

Dred shakes her head.

DRED

I knew it.

AGRIPPA

But I wasn't lying. This is what I
need right now.

ALEX

Agrippa?

AGRIPPA

I'm not looking for a suicide
mission. But I'm... I'm at a place
in life where I'm willing to accept
some unlikely odds.

He looks at Dred.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

Please. I need this right now. I'm
not doing you a favor; you're doing
this as a favor to me. For old
times.

Dred wants to say no, but they are old friends, and it's
hard.

DRED

Five months. But our wizard will
need to start prepping the ship
now, if she can.

Agrippa whirs back into motion, all the screens back on.

AGRIPPA

Forward me her information and give
her my address.

DRED

She is... she's a character.

AGRIPPA

Does she eat babies?

ALEX

NO.

AGRIPPA

Then I'm sure we'll get along fine.

INT. MEAD SHOP - DAY

Technically a bar, but more analogous to a tea shop. Doilies, small cups, lots of simulated sunlight - though outside the windows is a massive cavern. A *lot* of open space, doorway at least three meters tall, ceiling a meter above that.

Edelfrid and Dred sit by the front window with a hot pot of mulled mead. Edelfrid doesn't look happy. She nods.

EDELFRID

It's... it's true. We put her through the standard tests of wizardry. She had some... unusual knowledge gaps, but I am forced to believe she's up to the task.

DRED

So when will Agrippa get the money for the ship? He's already preparing it.

EDELFRID

That wasn't the deal. You still need at least a hacker. And more importantly, my colleagues have pointed out some gaps in your strategy, and I agree with them.

DRED

What gaps?

EDELFRID

Suppose something goes wrong?

DRED

Then we'll all die, so what?

EDELFRID

Exactly. Plan for failure if you want to succeed. I want some indication that things won't fall apart at the first hiccup.

Dred sighs, leans back, thinks.

DRED

I mean... I hear you, but there's really no room for error here.

(MORE)

DRED (CONT'D)

I'd rather focus on making sure things go right. If things go wrong, we'd have to fight an army, and there's not much we can do against that.

EDELFRID

You could bring a mercenary.

Dred laughs.

DRED

If we bring enough people to bump our odds up at all, we don't have any space for booty.

EDELFRID

We have a candidate in mind we'd approve of.

DRED

"A" candidate?

EDELFRID

He works alone.

DRED

What is one man going to do against a swarm of kobolds and drakes?

EDELFRID

It's not just one man. Your wizard seems like she can handle herself in a fight. You're rather resourceful yourself.

DRED

Okay, but-

Edelfrid stands, gestures on a tablet; Dred's wrist beeps.

EDELFRID

Regardless, I've set up a meeting with him. He'll be here soon. I regret not being able to join you, but you are hardly my only ward, nor my most foolhardy, so-

DRED

Wait wait wait-

Edelfrid leaves.

DRED (CONT'D)
You can't just...!

What the hell, man.

She looks at her wrist, examines the info Edelfrid sent her.

Dred's eyes bug out of her head.

Quick gestures, and Alex appears, still in bed.

ALEX
What? I'd just gotten to sleep.

DRED
Edelfrid is making us hire a merc.
I'm sending you his info.

ALEX
One merc?

He laughs. Looks at something we can't see.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Fat lot of good that...

Beat. He licks his eyes; it's kinda weird.

He leans off the bed to see clearer. Falls off the bed.

DRED
Yeah, that was about my reaction.

ALEX
You don't... he wouldn't...

DRED
He's almost here. I'm going to have
mead with him.

ALEX
Does he like mead? Most ogres don't
like things too sweet.

A deep, booming voice, but restrained, like it's used to trying not to scare anyone. Thick accent.

CLAUDE
I'm not like most ogres.

CLAUDE, a three-meter-tall OGRE with a single twisted horn, massive upturned tusks, and deep yellow skin, somehow manages to squat down on the chair Edelfrid had been sitting in.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
But no, I do not like mead.

Dred flicks her wrist, and Alex disappears. She's in awe.

DRED
We... we can go somewhere else.

Claude shakes his head.

CLAUDE
No, I like it here. I like the atmosphere.

He nods to a waiter, who seems to be familiar with him. They bring over a massive stewpot full of wine, which Claude picks up like a mug.

Dred swallows.

DRED
Um... I didn't... Edelfrid gave me, like, two minutes notice that you... it's an honor to meet you?

Claude shrugs, embarrassed.

CLAUDE
How are you doing today? Etheldred, yes?

DRED
Yes. My friends call me Dred.

Claude chuckles.

CLAUDE
Ooh! Very intimidating. It's a good name for a... what do you call yourself? Surely not "criminal."

DRED
I guess I think of myself as an "outlaw."

Claude hums approval, nods. Sips his wine.

DRED (CONT'D)
That's behind me, though. I'm royalty now.

Claude smiles, a little sad, a little paternal. It'd be patronizing if he didn't seem so vulnerable.

CLAUDE

I have wished many times that my past did not define me, also.

DRED

I can understand that. With a reputation like yours.

CLAUDE

I earned it, in fire and blood. But enough about me. I understand we are fighting a dragon?

DRED

No! Gods, no. Not if we can help it.

Claude nods. "Looks like you're sane." He's a little disappointed, though.

CLAUDE

Then what are we doing?

DRED

Robbing one. Jushur, to be specific.

Claude chuckles.

CLAUDE

Oh. This is fine, then.

DRED

What's with the laugh?

CLAUDE

You tell me we are not fighting a dragon, but then tell me we are stealing from him. As though there will not be a fight.

DRED

We've got a plan. It's all-

Claude holds up a hand.

CLAUDE

I am okay with this. Fight or no fight.

DRED

You'd just... fight a dragon?

Claude shrugs.

CLAUDE
Not for no reason.

DRED
But this counts as a reason?

CLAUDE
Certainly. When do we leave?

DRED
You don't want to know about pay or anything?

CLAUDE
I have enough money.

Dred takes a beat to digest this conversation.

DRED
O-kay then. It'll be about four months. But we're getting together next week to start talking strategy.

Claude finishes his wine. Stands to leave.

CLAUDE
I will spend the time practicing.

Dred stands, struggles to find a way to shake Claude's hand that doesn't make her look like an infant.

She gives up, waves goodbye.

INT. EDELFRID'S OFFICE - DAY

Dred, Johanna, Agrippa, and Claude sit in a circle of chairs, along with Edelfrid and a hologram of Alex.

Johanna picks at her prodigious nails, Agrippa sits motionless, and Claude drums his hands on his knees.

Edelfrid looks at Dred. Coughs.

DRED
So.

Dred stands.

DRED (CONT'D)
This is us. This is the crew.

EDELFRID
What about the hacker?

ALEX
I'm working on it. Got a lead.

EDELFRID
How many leads have we been through
so far?

ALEX
(casual)
Seventeen.

Edelfrid looks at Dred.

DRED
Hey, you didn't think we could find
a wizard, either, and look at...

Johanna looks up from chewing on her toenails.

DRED (CONT'D)
You really need to do that here?

Johanna spits out a nail. Shifts in her seat, still holding
her foot.

Dred looks back at Edelfrid.

DRED (CONT'D)
We've got time.

CLAUDE
I have a friend. He is a pretty
good hacker.

EDELFRID
Good enough to hack a planet?

Claude bobs his head.

CLAUDE
I do not know this, but if anybody
that I know can do it, he can do it
too.

EDELFRID
Great. Give us his contact
information, or give him ours.

CLAUDE
I will do it.

He puts a finger to his temple; his eye flashes.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
Yes, hello.

DRED
I didn't...

Fine, whatever.

DRED (CONT'D)
Okay. We'll wait.

CLAUDE
Hello, yes. I have some friends who
have a job idea for you to take.
Yes. Go ahead.

ZORION, the glowing woman who worked with Swithin, appears among them.

ZORION
Swithin is very busy right now, but
I...

She notices Dred. Barks a laugh.

ZORION (CONT'D)
Hang on.

She disappears. A hologram of Swithin appears in her place.

SWITHIN
Oh.

ALEX
(starstruck)
Swithin?

SWITHIN
Yes?

ALEX
...Hi-i-i.

Beat.

CLAUDE
My friends need someone to hack a
planet. Is this a thing you can do?

SWITHIN
No. That doesn't even make sense.

Claude looks at Dred.

CLAUDE

Oh. I am sorry.

ALEX

But you're Swithin. If anyone can
hack a Dwarven Defense Mesh-

SWITHIN

Oh, that's what you wanted? I
wouldn't call it "hacking a
planet." And if anyone could, sure,
I probably could figure something
out. But nobody can. These new
models have walls guarding their
walls. Anything is hackable, but
you'd either alert the whole system
or it'd take about fifteen years.

EDELFRID

We're very proud of them.

Swithin nods at her, very respectful.

SWITHIN

You should be.

DRED

You said the newer models? How new?

Swithin shakes his head.

SWITHIN

Anything they've still got
operating. Very good about security
updates, Dwarves are. I tried to
steal a moon from one of their
distant colonies. Couldn't even get
it out of orbit before-

JOHANNA

I am, so, so bored right now.

Swithin looks at her. His jaw drops.

SWITHIN

Are you still using a Spellweaver
Yellow?

Johanna perks right up.

JOHANNA

Technically, but I'm running so many mods it's unrecognizable.

Swithin cocks his head. Examines.

SWITHIN

Black flames. I didn't think the Yellow's manager could handle that many.

JOHANNA

It can and it can't. Arbitrary limit. You just have to throw anything over 250 in a Q-array and then call them with a brownie injection.

SWITHIN

You wouldn't prefer a mentaldex?

Johanna scowls.

JOHANNA

Not everyone can afford all your fancy shit.

SWITHIN

You've got a library that has to be worth-

DRED

Swithin!

Back to reality. He looks at her.

DRED (CONT'D)

What if it was a planet that hadn't been updated in... what, eight thousand years?

SWITHIN

So it's still running, on, what, quartz?

EDELFRID

It is.

SWITHIN

Why do you still have a quartz... Jushurka.

DRED

Can you get us on the planet?

SWITHIN

I can't.

Everyone's shoulders slump, Dred's especially.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

But Zorion should be able to.

Zorion reappears.

ZORION

You'd need to get me there,
physically.

JOHANNA

Aren't you a sprite? You can't just
bounce around the ether?

ZORION

I'm still bound.

Swithin holds up his arm, showcasing the massive "gaming watch" that takes up his whole forearm.

JOHANNA

Bummer.

ZORION

(no shit)
Yes.

EDELFRID

But you can do it? No doubts about
your ability to perform?

ZORION

I'm more concerned with whether you
can get me back safely. Swithin
finding me floating in the void was
a once-in-a-lifetime stroke of
luck, I'm not counting on another.

DRED

We'll get you back safely. I have a
rule about survival. The second the
odds turn against us, we back out.

ZORION

That worked very well for you in
the Federates.

DRED

Lew was an idiot. And you don't
know all the odds at play there.
And how do you know about that?

Zorion looks at Alex. Back at Dred.

ZORION

Any external variables that were in
effect there are still in effect
now.

They stare at each other.

SWITHIN

(to Zorion)

Regardless, if I decide to go,
you're kind of stuck. And I'm
almost as immortal as you.

ZORION

There's no such thing as "almost"
immortal.

SWITHIN

So what's the plan?

Dred looks at Edelfrid.

Edelfrid sighs. Nods.

Dred smiles.

INT. DIRTY BASEMENT - NIGHT

Alex sits at the computer, working. The hooded figure enters.

HOODED FIGURE

So how's the planning going? Got
the team put together?

ALEX

It's going fine. We've got
everyone.

HOODED FIGURE

Who'd you get? Anyone I know?

Alex hisses a laugh.

ALEX

Yes.

Beat. The hooded figure taps his foot.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Claude.

HOODED FIGURE
Claude who? Claude...

He freezes. Beat.

ALEX
Yeah. That Claude.

The hooded figure's voice is less casual than it's ever been. He sounds angry.

HOODED FIGURE
Bullshit.

ALEX
It's true. Why?

HOODED FIGURE
Prove it.

He walks to the computer. Alex is REPULSED as if by a force field, but presses through it to navigate the interface.

Alex pulls up a recording of the group meeting, points out Claude.

The hooded figure stumbles backwards.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)
What the fuck?! What is he...

He looks at Alex, who's confused.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)
You're really fucking doing it,
aren't you?

ALEX
...Yes?

Huge sigh of relief.

HOODED FIGURE
Oh thank god. What the fuck.

ALEX
Why? What did you think...

He puts two and two together.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You thought it was all a ruse. We were putting together a rescue squad. For me.

HOODED FIGURE

I've got the whole room wired to explode, place is littered with boobytraps and deadzones.

It just now hits him what exactly Dred is trying to do.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)

Wait, so we're really banking on her robbing a fucking dragon?

He laughs.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)

She really, uh... she dreams big.

He pats Alex on the shoulder.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)

You too, I guess. Good luck.

ALEX

Good luck, you hope we succeed? Why am I reading something else into that?

HOODED FIGURE

Good luck, I hope she doesn't die. We'll totally torture you to death.

Finger guns as he leaves.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)

Take it easy.

INT. SHIPYARD - SPACE

Dred stands by one of the docks with a set of suitcases hovering behind her.

Their ship, DRAGONSLAYER, rises into view in front of her. It's massive, about half a kilometer long, and a hundred meters wide and tall, and shaped sort of like a black fish with three tails and a huge bulb on its forehead. The bulb is a thin frame around a transparent bubble - the bridge.

Dred takes it in. She doesn't smile; too nervous. But she is excited.

Johanna walks up next to her.

JOHANNA
Did we really settle on black?

DRED
That alone won't hide us, but any
other color works against us.

She scoffs.

JOHANNA
Cowardly.

DRED
(for fuck's sake)
We literally hired you to help us
hide.

JOHANNA
That's different!

She stomps off to board. Dred shakes her head and follows her.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - DRED'S CABIN

It's state-of-the-art. Stainless steel, but with illusory displays set up on every surface, making decorating as simple as changing your phone's background. Dred swipes through several options, settles on a mountaintop for the moment.

Edelfrid walks in, shudders.

EDELFRID
I have to remind myself you're
half-human.

She looks out over the (simulated) horizon.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
This is torturous. Can we get some
walls at least while I'm here?

She doesn't wait for Dred to respond, just gestures, and wooden walls prop up around them, a ceiling drops down; you can still see the view through windows, but now they're in a monastery.

DRED
My dad never minded open air.

EDELFRID

Your father didn't grow up with us,
either.

DRED

You knew him?

Edelfrid shakes her head.

EDELFRID

Worked with him a few times, mostly
on your uncle's behalf. Seemed nice
enough. Poor taste in women.

DRED

My mom wasn't really that bad. She
was just... really not a dwarf.

Edelfrid laughs.

EDELFRID

Only if you think honor and respect
are intrinsically dwarven traits.

DRED

She's still my mom, okay?

Edelfrid holds up a hand in apology.

EDELFRID

I look forward to your safe return.

DRED

You manage to negotiate a
commission?

She smirks.

EDELFRID

I've been looking at some
retirement options.

DRED

(genuine)
Good for you.

Edelfrid hesitates. She's uncomfortable saying it, but...

EDELFRID

I... do feel compelled to warn you.
The moment you die, you're no
longer under my care. In case you
were hoping I could...

DRED
No. I die, Alex dies. I understand.

Edelfrid nods.

EDELFRID
It's not too late to call it off.

DRED
If I didn't think we could do it, I never would've started.

EDELFRID
So be it. I...

She bows. Dred gives her an awkward hug.

DRED
See you when I see you.

EDELFRID
Indeed.

Edelfrid gestures, the walls fall away. She shudders one more time, leaves.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - COMMON ROOM

It's pretty big; tall ceilings to accomodate Claude, enough space to more or less combine a dining room, living room, and a few desks and terminals.

Johanna sleeps on one of the oversized sofas, Claude walks around examining everything, and Swithin tweaks one of the terminals to meet his workflow.

Dred walks in at the same time as Agrippa.

Dred clears her throat, gets everyone's attention.

Claude taps Johanna, nods towards Dred. Johanna sits up, grumpy.

Swithin taps his wrist computer; Zorion appears next to him.

DRED
As captain, I feel like I should give a little speech before we get going.

Actually-

AGRIPPA

JOHANNA
Wait, who says you're captain?

Dred was not expecting this to be a question.

DRED

I put the team together. This is my op.

SWITHIN

And we're going along with your plan, but let's be honest: you are not the most experienced person here.

DRED

I've been working on this plan for decades now. I know every part of how it'll work.

SWITHIN

Really? You know every part of how hacking the planetary mesh will work?

Dred lets out an exaggerated sigh.

DRED

Obviously not. But-

CLAUDE

I am willing to follow you as captain. Do you want us to call you Captain Dred?

DRED

That's not necessary. I just-

JOHANNA

I'm definitely not calling you that. Honestly, I'll probably call you "Ethel" because it'll be like I'm making fun of your name.

DRED

That is my name.

Johanna laughs.

DRED (CONT'D)

Can I just give my speech before we launch?

AGRIPPA

I was trying to tell you, we launched like half an hour ago.

Beat. Dred stares at him.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

As soon as everything was loaded
and Edelfrid was off. Did you want
to wait?

Dred bites her tongue.

Walks away.

Beat.

Everyone goes back to what they were doing. Agrippa leaves.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

The ship is currently travelling through subspace - the
outside view is filled with sparkling lights in all the
colors of the rainbow.

Dred stares out the window. Agrippa walks up next to her.

They stand for a beat.

AGRIPPA

Should take us about three months.

Dred shakes her head.

DRED

Four.

Agrippa cocks his head. Looks at a holodisplay.

AGRIPPA

No, my calculations-

DRED

Aren't accounting for the
convergence we'll bump into in
about a month.

AGRIPPA

There's a convergence? Where?

Dred looks at the display, cycles through a galactic map to a
seemingly random point in space.

DRED

It hasn't appeared yet, but this
one flares up pretty regularly.

AGRIPPA

Why isn't it on the charts?

DRED

Because it's outside traveled space. Waste of effort to track. But napkin math says we'll hit it. No big deal to switch to standard travel for a while.

AGRIPPA

I guess not.

He looks out the window at the lights. Touches the window.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

It's always fascinated me. An entire civilization living beneath us, but that we can never touch.

DRED

You must be thrilled to have Zorion on board, then.

AGRIPPA

I'm trying to restrain myself. But yes, very much so. Do you think she'd have any objection to me catching a pixie or two?

DRED

We can ask her.

She taps on a display.

AGRIPPA

No, no, wait!

DRED

Hey Zorion, Agrippa has a question for you.

Zorion appears standing next to them; she already looks like she's been waiting.

AGRIPPA

Oh. I was just... it's really nothing.

DRED

He wants to know if you're cool with him throwing a pixie in a bottle.

Zorion laughs.

ZORION
Would you object to me reusing some
old code of yours in a personal
project?

AGRIPPA
No, but that's different.

Zorion shakes her head. Walks to the window, stares out it.
There's a hint of sadness in her voice.

ZORION
Not very. They're just routines and
subroutines.

AGRIPPA
"Just highly advanced AI containing
the secrets of the universe. No big
deal."

Zorion reaches a (holographic, simulated) hand out through
the window. One of the lights dances around her fingers.

ZORION
If you only knew...

She closes her hand around the light, but the light slips
through her and dances away.

ZORION (CONT'D)
Excuse me.

She disappears.

AGRIPPA
Oh no. I offended her.

DRED
I don't think so. She's a Dryad,
remember?

Agrippa looks at her, understands.

AGRIPPA
I'd never thought about that. She
must hate subspace travel.

SWITHIN
It's a mixed bag.

Swithin walks in, steps to the window.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

I spent seventy years in a troll
prison once.

Dred opens her mouth, but Swithin shakes his head.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

Don't ask.

Swithin pulls a hollow glass sphere out of a pocket.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

About twenty years in, I managed to
get a picture of home smuggled in.
Nothing impressive, just a sunset
shot with some trees.

He gestures, and then slides the sphere straight into the
ship's window; it slides through and wedges in the middle,
like there was a hole exactly its size.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

There were times I couldn't stand
to look at it, obviously. Almost
threw it away a couple times.

A small display appears on the side of the sphere. He hits
some buttons, and a hole opens on the outside of it; a pixie
floats in, and the hole closes behind it.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

There were other times it was the
only way that I survived.

He pulls the sphere out of the window (which is still fully
intact), hands it to Agrippa.

DRED

You don't normally leave a Troll
prison.

Swithin looks at her, shakes his head. "I said no."

Agrippa holds up the pixie.

AGRIPPA

Thank you.

SWITHIN

Least I can do.

There's more under the surface there, and Dred can tell. She
looks between them as if squinting hard enough can show her
what she's missing.

DRED
Whatever. I've got stuff to do.

She leaves.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - COMMON ROOM

The group eats together on the sofas, watches a holomovie.

The movie cuts off abruptly, and the ship shudders.

Johanna yells, throws a drumstick at the display.

AGRIPPA
(to Dred)
Looks like you were right about the
convergence.

DRED
Wasn't expecting it so soon,
though. This sucks.

JOHANNA
What convergence?

AGRIPPA
A minor inconvenience. Our travel
plans already accounted for it.

JOHANNA
But where's the movie?

AGRIPPA
If the convergence stays, we won't
have comms until well after we're
on our way home.

DRED
I kept meaning to download a bunch
of vids.

SWITHIN
I have big collection, but it's
mostly historical dramas.

DRED
Better than nothing.

Swithin nods, fiddles with his wrist computer.

SWITHIN
I'll throw it on the intra.

Zorion puts her hand over his computer.

ZORION
Already took care of it.

CLAUDE
So let us turn on one of these
dramas?

JOHANNA
Boo! I liked what we were watching!

CLAUDE
I do not think that is an option
for us anymore.

Johanna stands, drops what's left of her food on the floor.

JOHANNA
Fine, watch whatever you want. I'm
going to check on the cloak.

CLAUDE
A wonderful idea! Perhaps we should
all do some work?

AGRIPPA
There's truly nothing to be
concerned about.

CLAUDE
It is not about concern; it is
about staying prepared!

He all but leaps to his feet.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
I will be in the gym if anybody
wishes to be the spotter to me!

DRED
I don't know if all of us would be
enough to spot you.

Johanna gets a wicked smile.

JOHANNA
I'm up to spar if you want, big
guy.

Claude looks sad, shakes his head.

CLAUDE
I cannot, goblin. I would kill you.

JOHANNA

That sounds like a coward's excuse to me!

DRED

Johanna, you know who you're talking to, right?

JOHANNA

Yeah, and the greatest fighter in the universe can't pull a punch?

CLAUDE

I cannot. It would be... rude.

JOHANNA

(what the fuck?)
Rude?

CLAUDE

I do not know the words. I cannot do this, though. "Pull a punch."

JOHANNA

Fine, bitch, whatever. Go jerk yourself off.

CLAUDE

I am sorry you think I am being a jerk.

Johanna laughs, leaves.

DRED

She doesn't... nevermind. I'll join you in the gym, but don't count on that spot.

CLAUDE

I will not count on it.

INT. ATMOSPHERIC OFFICE - DAY

The hooded figure looks at a terminal. Looks up to a lackey in the corner.

HOODED FIGURE

Bring him in.

Alex, in cuffs, is dragged to the hooded figure.

ALEX

Look, relax. Everything is fine.

HOODED FIGURE
I didn't bring you here because of
that.

 ALEX
This is about Dred, right? She hit
a convergance-

 HOODED FIGURE
Which means she's out of comms for,
like, five months? No way for her
to talk to us, or for us to talk to
her.

Alex looks uneasy.

 ALEX
...Yeah.

 HOODED FIGURE
Turns out I do know anything about
anything. Weird, right?

 ALEX
What did you want, then?

 HOODED FIGURE
I know you think of me as this all-
important, all-powerful figure.

Alex bites his tongue.

 HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)
Which I appreciate, really. It's
nice to be respected. But I do have
bosses. I have deadlines. I have...
debts.

The hooded figure leans down, gets in Alex's face.

 HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)
Interestingly enough, so do you.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - DRED'S CABIN

Dred sits at her terminal, staring at a map of Jushur's
system.

The lights cut out, the holowalls turn off. Red lights turn
on. Agrippa's voice on the intercom.

AGRIPPA (O.S.)
If everyone would join me on the
bridge, immediately.

Dred bolts for the door.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

Holodisplays have transformed the bridge to have a 360-degree view of the space around them, as though there was no ship, only a glass bubble.

Agrippa and Zorion stand near one side of the bubble. Dred runs in, followed by Swithin and Johanna. Swithin is engrossed in his computer.

DRED
What's the problem?

Agrippa points. The wall magnifies, revealing a small gunboat headed towards them.

AGRIPPA
Pirates. There'll be more soon.

DRED
How did they find us so quick? The
convergence isn't even over!

Swithin doesn't look up.

AGRIPPA
It's unmanned. Looks like they've
got a few dozen scattered around
using optical comms. Has its
downsides, but it uses virtually no
power; they could leave them out
here indefinitely and just check
what they've caught after every
convergence.

DRED
Kind of brilliant.

ZORION
There's another already on the way.
Probably fifteen minutes out.

AGRIPPA
(to Dred)
It was a beautiful stroke of luck
when you found a Sprite to come
with us.

(MORE)

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
(to Zorion)
Do you know if it's the same size?

She shakes her head.

ZORION
It's not deep in subspace, and I
don't have many contacts in this
region. I don't know.

DRED
We'll have to operate on the
assumption it's bigger, then.

Claude clambers in, in his pajamas.

DRED (CONT'D)
What sort of weapons systems do we
have?

AGRIPPA
Cursory.

Agrippa gestures to Claude.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
I thought we were counting on him.

CLAUDE
To do what?

Dred points at the gunship.

DRED
Pirates.

JOHANNA
We don't need him. I can take it
myself.

AGRIPPA
That's a class-two gunship.

CLAUDE
That is all? She can handle this,
yes.

Claude nods eagerly.

JOHANNA
See? No biggie.

DRED

Claude, you've never even seen her fight.

JOHANNA

He just has to look at me. I'm a fucking beast!

CLAUDE

I only assume. Class-two, this is a small thing.

SWITHIN

Maybe to Claude the Maelstrom. To the rest of us, it's a pretty big-

JOHANNA

Speak for yourself!

Johanna hits a button; a full bodysuit materializes over her.

AGRIPPA

No, wait!

But Johanna jumps through the wall and out into space.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Johanna gestures, and shoots flames from her hands like rockets. She hurtles towards the gunship at breakneck speed.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Dred growls, runs to the window.

DRED

Motherfucker.

AGRIPPA

I might be able to retrieve her.

DRED

No. We hired her because she was the best.

She sighs.

DRED (CONT'D)

And also because she was crazy.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Johanna is already several kilometers from the Dragonslayer, putting her within firing range of the gunship.

Just as another gunship leaves subspace to arrive right next to the first one.

DRED

Hell yeah! The more the merrier!

Dred pops up on comms.

DRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Alright, she needs support,
there's-

JOHANNA

If you send anyone else out here, I
swear to you, I will SHIT

Lasers narrowly miss her, and she's forced to devote all of her attention to dodging.

The gunships swoop in, one moving to chase, the other angling in for an attack.

Johanna's not particularly graceful or agile, but damn she is FAST. The gunships just can't keep up.

She puts a kilometer between her and the gunships, then stops; Another series of gestures, and she hurtles backwards, moving towards the gunships now.

The gunships see what she's doing, but react too slowly; she overshoots them, then switches gears; now she's chasing one of them.

She hurls a lightning bolt at the one she's chasing; direct hit, but it's absorbed by the shields.

The other gunship swoops in to attack, fires a missile. Johanna claps her hands together, throws them forward; the missile explodes against an invisible wall.

She throws another lightning bolt, and then suddenly has to dodge lasers from a third gunship that appears behind her.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Dred moves from a magnified window showing Johanna's plight. She runs to the button on the wall, gets her own spacesuit.

DRED
She needs help.

AGRIPPA
And what are you going to do? You
have a starfighter I don't know
about?

CLAUDE
(hopeful)
You are overreacting. She is
handling them.

DRED
For now! One hit and she-

Swithin, who'd put on a suit without being noticed, charges
out of the window.

Dred leaps out behind him.

Agrippa looks at Claude; "Are you really just going to stand
there?" Claude shrugs.

Zorion sighs. She stays in a stationary posture, but suddenly
rockets out of the ship like she's tied to Swithin.

EXT. SPACE

Johanna stands on the nose of one of the gunships, holding
tight to a shining chain as the ship wheels around trying to
dislodge her. It's not working, but it is stopping her from
attacking.

Two more gunships jump out of subspace. They position with
the others, aimed at her, but not firing for fear of damaging
the ship she's riding.

JOHANNA
You want some too? I've got enough
for ALL YOU MOTHERFUCKERS!

She's pissed now. She materializes a slender spear in one
hand.

She **SHOVES IT THROUGH HER OWN FOOT**, nailing herself to the
gunship.

She drops the chain (it disappears), and moves her hands in a
grand, sweeping gesture. A three meter glowing orb appears
above her head.

She points a finger at the orb, and it locks, like it was on the end of a stick that protruded from her finger.

A sharp eye will notice Swithin and Dred stealthily climbing around on one of the gunships nearby.

Johanna carefully, very carefully, moves the orb around until it touches the ship she's nailed to.

The orb eats straight through the shield, which flickers out, and then moves right through the ship, as if anything it touches never existed.

Johanna cackles maniacally as the ship starts to explode. She slams her fist on the top of the spear; the spear disappears into a shockwave that blows the detonating gunship away.

The only deterrent gone, the other gunships open fire on Johanna.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Oh, right.

Dred swoops in on a rocket surfboard and snatches Johanna, just narrowly avoiding the barrage.

DRED

You're welcome.

JOHANNA

Fuck you, I had it under control.

Now safe, she jumps from the surfboard and rockets off back towards the gunships.

ON SWITHIN

Swithin, clinging to the side of one of the gunships, has a panel open and fiddles with his wrist computer.

Zorion stands next to him, watching Dred and Johanna.

ZORION

Three seconds.

SWITHIN

Say when.

Beat.

ZORION

When.

Swithin hits a button. The gunship they're on fires everything it has straight ahead - right into one of the other gunships.

Two down, three to go.

Zorion cocks her head,

ZORION (CONT'D)
It knows it's compromised. It's leaving.

SWITHIN
I'm almost in, can you just-

Zorion kneels, pops her head inside the ship.

ZORION
(muffled)
To your left. Up, straight up.
You're on it.

A happy light blinks; Zorion stands.

SWITHIN
We're in business.

Two more gunships jump out of subspace, followed immediately by a third.

Swithin looks at Zorion.

ZORION
More coming. I'll take this one,
you go.

Zorion disappears into the gunship. Golden light flares from every light on the gunship, then they return to normal.

Swithin jumps off the ship and heads towards one of the newcomers.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

Agrippa works a console furiously; Claude leans against a wall, watching the fight, stressed out of his mind.

AGRIPPA
Damn things are shielded tight
against wireless.

Johanna comes in on comms.

JOHANNA (O.S.)
 Hey, guy we brought on SPECIFICALLY
 FOR THIS. You're really not going
 to do anything?

Claude grits his teeth.

EXT. SPACE

ON DRED

Dred rides her board alongside a gunship that's on Swithin's tail.

She holds out a hand, materializes a long pole with a bulbous tip.

She slams the pole into the ship, and it sticks on like it was part of the ship.

DRED
 Jojo! Bring the storm!

Dred veers off, and the pole grows another ten meters.

JOHANNA (O.S.)
 I have killed...

A grunt over comms. A MASSIVE BOLT OF LIGHTNING BLASTS the pole, which lets the lighting bypass the shields; a huge explosion rocks the gunship.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
 WHOO! Everyone who ever called me
 that!

DRED
 Good thing we're friends!

ON SWITHIN

Freed of his pursuer, Swithin stops to get his bearings.

He counts.

SWITHIN
 Damn it! How many more of these
 things are there?

ZORION (O.S.)
 Eight remain.

Another one jumps in right beneath him.

ZORION (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Nine remain.

He drops down and lands on its nose.

SWITHIN
Caught that, thanks.

Swithin flips a switch on his boots, anchors himself. He pries up a panel.

ZORION (O.S.)
More coming.

SWITHIN
How many more?

Swithin digs around some wires; pulls a plug from his wrist computer, connects it to the ship.

ZORION (O.S.)
Many. I will attempt to slow them.

SWITHIN
That would be helpful, thank you.

One of the gunships drifts directly in front of Swithin, laser cannon aimed straight at him.

Swithin looks down the barrel of the cannon.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)
Confirm for me: They won't fire if they'd hit a friendly?

ZORION (O.S.)
Uncertain. I am noticing a change in some of their targeting routines.

Swithin jumps off the ship just as the other ship fires; he narrowly avoids the laser blast, which instead ricochets off the other ship's shields.

ZORION (O.S.) (CONT'D)
They seem surprisingly adaptable.

SWITHIN
Noted.

ON JOHANNA

Johanna rides Zorion's gunship; as Zorion chases down other gunships, Johanna throws lightning at anyone that tries to retaliate.

One of the other gunships swoops in close, trying to ram Johanna. Johanna jumps off of Zorion's ship and lands on the attacker. One of her hands ignites in liquid flame, and she presses against the hull, slowly melting her way through it.

The ship goes into a wild spin, trying to throw her off; she shoves her whole forearm inside, holding on tight.

She yells, and light SURGES down her arm from her shoulder, again and again and again; the ship shudders each time.

Finally, the ship just... stops. Johanna jumps off, tosses a tiny bead of fire inside the hole she left.

All the gunships STOP; it takes the Crew a beat to realize, then they hesitate.

DRED

What's going on?

ZORION (O.S.)

I think we won. One second.

Beat. Johanna keeps zapping one of the gunships with lightning.

The gunships all turn, dive into subspace and disappear.

Zorion reappears near Swithin. Everyone congregates.

ZORION (CONT'D)

They took enough losses.

JOHANNA

Fuck yeah!

DRED

Okay. Good work. Back to the ship.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

Everyone files in through the window. Walks past Claude, who's so glad they're safe; most of them give him dirty looks, except Dred, who doesn't look at him at all.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - COMMON ROOM

Everyone eats dinner in silence. Nobody looks happy.

Johanna glares at Claude, chews loudly.

DRED

If you have something to say, say
it.

JOHANNA

Why even bring the ogre if he isn't
going to do anything?

Before Claude can respond:

DRED

Claude is a sledgehammer.
Sledgehammers are great for a lot
of things, but sometimes knives are
better.

JOHANNA

You know what sledgehammers are
great at? Fucking breaking things!

CLAUDE

I do not love this analogy.

JOHANNA

Shut up! You just sat in here while
the rest of us risked our asses!

CLAUDE

I did not want to-

JOHANNA

Did it look like I wanted to go out
there?

Swithin leans to Zorion. Mouths "Yeah."

She points fork at Dred.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

No! I did what needed to be done!

AGRIPPA

Everything worked out for the best-

JOHANNA

This time! What happens next time?

DRED
If we needed him, he would've come

JOHANNA
This is bullshit. You're bullshit.

She grabs her food, hesitates; snatches a roll off of Swithin's plate, and leaves.

DRED
Anyone else have anything to say?

Swithin's been quieter about it, but his face agrees with Johanna.

SWITHIN
...I would be more comfortable if I knew why you'd refused to join us.

Claude sighs.

CLAUDE
I...

He coughs. Sits up straighter.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
You are correct. I should have joined you.

SWITHIN
But why didn't you?

The pain on his face is evident.

Dred notices.

DRED
Because he didn't have to, and he knew we needed someone to watch the ship. Those gunships could've jumped in anywhere, someone needed to stay. It's easy to say it was the wrong choice now, but things were hairy.

Claude relaxes a bit, looks at Dred, grateful.

Swithin takes a breath. Nods. That's an acceptable explanation.

He leaves; Zorion follows.

Dred coughs at Agrippa.

AGRIPPA

I'll check on our heading.

Agrippa leaves.

Dred and Claude look at each other.

DRED

Do you have a reason?

Claude nods.

DRED (CONT'D)

Is it something I should know about?

Beat.

Claude nods, sighs.

CLAUDE

I... I have not fought in many years. Not a tiny fight.

Dred's eyes widen.

DRED

You're rusty?

CLAUDE

I am not "rusty." And if I am, I am still the best. That is not the problem that I have.

DRED

Then what is it?

CLAUDE

All of my life, when I am fighting, I get the bloodlust. I usually control it. But recently... once I have begun to fight, it is very difficult to stop. I have... hurt friends. Allies. Unintentionally.

DRED

But you seemed so eager to come here...

She understands.

DRED (CONT'D)

You weren't okay with dying. You came here to die. Dying was the goal.

CLAUDE

I want my dying to have purpose. To accomplish something. Fighting a dragon to save friends, this is a purpose.

DRED

So, what, if things go south I'm supposed to just throw you at the bad guys and leave you?

Claude nods.

DRED (CONT'D)

Fuck no.

Claude's surprised at her intensity.

DRED (CONT'D)

You wanted to die a hero, you came on the wrong trip. There are no heroes here. Everybody's coming home.

CLAUDE

But-

DRED

If that means you can't fight, then you can't fucking fight. No exceptions. You can consider that a standing order from your captain.

Claude pounds the table with a heavy fist. It splinters, shimmers, then repairs itself.

DRED (CONT'D)

Are we going to have a problem?

Beat.

CLAUDE

But if a fight must happen-

DRED

Then I will be right there beside you, so you better fucking control yourself.

Beat. Claude softens.

He nods.

CLAUDE
I understand.

DRED
Good.

INT. EDELFRID'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Edelfrid talks to a small hologram on her desk - LORD THYRFAR.

Thyrfar consults a list in his hand.

LORD THYRFAR
Last but not least-

EDELFRID
Etheldred.

LORD THYRFAR
You still haven't heard from her?

Edelfrid stiffens.

EDELFRID
I still haven't expected to. The convergence-

LORD THYRFAR
This trip was supposed to be how long, in total?

EDELFRID
For the sixteenth time, the convergence delays things. They encountered it so early, it wouldn't be surprising if the entire trip took twice as long as it was supposed to.

Thyrfar sighs. Gives her a look like, "Let's be frank."

LORD THYRFAR
Edelfrid. I understand you were fond of her. But she was going dragon hunting. She was never going to come home.

Beat. Edelfrid doesn't crack.

EDELFRID

I understand that. But we still shouldn't write her off until she's had a chance to return.

LORD THYRFAR

We've been talking about this. I understand your interpretation of the schedule of care, but it's been decided that, in circumstances where the likelihood of death is this high, we should go off of the presumed time of death, rather than news of that death.

That surprises her. She shifts in her seat, sits up straighter.

EDELFRID

What are you saying?

LORD THYRFAR

I'm saying, to the Throne, Etheldred is already dead. Has been for almost two months now. You're now considered to be open to another ward.

Beat. Edelfrid thinks through the implications.

EDELFRID

No. No. I refuse to accept that decision.

LORD THYRFAR

Edelfrid-

EDELFRID

It's not about me, it's about the Law. Your interpretation is in opposition to both the letter and the spirit of the law, and if you try to hold me to it, you can expect a full challenge in the Council.

Thyrfar throws his hands up in exasperation.

LORD THYRFAR

You admit she's already dead.

Edelfrid considers. Nods hesitantly.

EDELFRID
Unofficially, yes.

Beat. Saying it out loud sucks.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
But not in a lawfully binding sense. While I admit that her death is a likely occurrence, I do not agree that it has legally occurred.

LORD THYRFAR
So this is, what, to get another two weeks of lighter workload? What's your endgame?

Edelfrid smirks.

EDELFRID
Goodnight, Thyrfar.

She switches him off.

Deep breath.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
Okay, Dred. Don't say I never did you any favors.

She presses a button.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)
Connect me to the Black Marks, please.

EXT. SPACE - GRAV STORM

Space is warped, distorted. Fuzzy; hard to see past it. This is the perpetual storm that surrounds Jushurka.

The Dragonslayer hovers just outside it.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

Dred and Agrippa stare at the storm.

AGRIPPA
What are we waiting for? It's not going to calm down.

DRED
I'm getting ready. Psyching myself
up.

AGRIPPA
...For?

Dred looks at him.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
You don't still think you're the
one flying through it?

DRED
How many storms have you ridden,
Agrippa?

AGRIPPA
One. How many eyes do you have?

DRED
Almost fifty. I've been- what?
Eyes?

Agrippa points at a plug on the control terminal.

AGRIPPA
That port connects me directly with
all of the ship's navigation
systems. I see in every direction
at once, on all visible spectra and
several invisible. I can dip into
subspace with a thought, and back
before you'd finish blinking. I can
see a projected map of up to point-
five megameters, including
gravitational anomalies and
predicted anomalies.

Dred grits her teeth.

DRED
And you think that makes up for
years of experience?

AGRIPPA
I think it does far more than that.
Moreover, it's not like I'm some
rookie pilot. I have more flying
experience than you, even if less
of it is in a storm.

DRED
Far less of it.

Agrippa shakes his head.

AGRIPPA

This is absurd. How many of those storms did you fly through with a frigate?

DRED

Five.

That surprises him.

AGRIPPA

...Really?

DRED

One of those a class-seven.

AGRIPPA

(impressed)

And you made it through?

DRED

No.

Agrippa laughs, moves to the plug.

DRED (CONT'D)

But it wasn't my fault! The whole ship was on fire and the engines were on the fritz. And I managed to get the escape pod out.

Agrippa sighs. He walks to the plug, sticks one of his arms in.

DRED (CONT'D)

No. This isn't your call to make. I'll-

AGRIPPA

We'll compromise.

A joystick pops out of his back, and a small holo control panel shimmers in around it.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

Deal?

Dred cocks her head. Can't stop herself from laughing.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

The Dragonslayer drifts for a beat.

DRED (O.S.)
Buckle up, everyone.

It SURGES forward into the storm.

As soon as it hits the storm, it's YANKED upward, even as it continues forward.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

Dred looks around, confused.

AGRIPPA
What the hell are you doing? I'm taking full control.

DRED
I don't feel anything!

AGRIPPA
...What were you expecting?

DRED
You to turn off the stabilizers!

AGRIPPA
See, I was wondering why you told everyone to buckle up.

The lights go red. A standing harness materializes around Dred as gravity disappears; her braid floats every which way.

DRED
That's more like it.

She eases on the joystick. Her braid jerks downward, then hangs.

AGRIPPA
Upcoming front.

DRED
I feel it.

AGRIPPA
You "feel" it? How can you-

DRED
I need to focus here.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

The Dragonslayer heads forward for a beat, then is yanked to the side. This time, it turns with the pull, rides it in a large circle until it's headed forwards again.

No sooner has it stabilized than its rear flips upwards over the front; they continue the flip until they've straightened out and dive straight down.

AGRIPPA (O.S.)
Ready for a dip.

DRED (O.S.)
Do it.

Space disappears; for a beat, there's only sparkling lights in a rainbow of colors, moving in rivers that match the flows of gravity.

AGRIPPA
See that path?

They surface into normal space, and the lights disappear.

DRED
Let's do it.

The ship makes a sharp curve to ride one of the flows. It shudders as they enter, then stabilizes.

Wreckages of other ships drift around them. They have to dip around to avoid them.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - CONTINUOUS

Dred goes pale.

DRED
Get Claude up here in the next twenty seconds.

AGRIPPA
Why? What is he going to-

DRED
(half-panicked)
DO IT!

AGRIPPA
He's coming, but... oh, no.

The stream of broken ships they're riding leads to a passive pool of debris formed into an impenetrable sphere.

Claude runs in, surefooted despite the shifts in gravity.

CLAUDE
What do you need?

DRED
How big of a gun did you bring?

CLAUDE
Very big. Why?

Agrippa points.

DRED
We need you to clear us a path.

EXT. SPACE - THE POOL

A closer view reveals it's not as solid as it looked before - it's just all moving so fast it might as well be.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

CLAUDE
I don't know if I can-

DRED
If you can't, we die.

Claude nods.

CLAUDE
Then I may as well try, no?

He pulls out a pistol the size of a mortar, that somehow still looks small in his hand.

AGRIPPA
You don't have anything bigger?

CLAUDE
I am not telling you the correct way to fly the ship.

DRED
Here we go.

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - CONTINUOUS

They rush towards the sphere. A few SHOTS from the bridge; something in the sphere EXPLODES, clearing a very small hole just big enough for the Dragonslayer.

They slide it like a glove, and are JERKED forward with the current. They overcorrect, bringing the nose of the ship high enough that Claude can fire another SHOT behind them; another EXPLOSION stops a small wave of junk from overtaking them.

A HUGE METAL BEAM bigger than their ship rushes towards them from inside the sphere.

DRED

DIP!

Just as the beam would hit them, they dive into subspace, and everything explodes into color again. There's still wreckage here, but it's different wreckage, and warps at weird angles, like space itself is bent here.

They have to immediately swerve to avoid some junk, and are about to crash into a ship ten times their size when they surface back into normal space.

A small current leads off of the sphere, and they're headed right towards it.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

AGRIPPA

That's our exit. Claude, can you-?

CLAUDE

Silence.

He lines up a shot.

Beat.

DRED

Any time!

Claude lowers his gun.

CLAUDE

I can't!

DRED

Oh FUCK

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - CONTINUOUS

They don't have a choice at this point; they rip into the current, smashing through some debris. A few small explosions along the hull, gaps that get covered by shiny green shields.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The bridge seems undamaged.

DRED
How bad is it?

AGRIPPA
Nothing that affects our control,
thank the gods.

DRED
What the fuck, Claude?

Claude shakes his head.

CLAUDE
Not my fault. All very... what is
the word?

A huge series of EXPLOSIONS behind them. They would've been caught in the middle of it.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
Very that.

Dred peeks behind her. Things are still exploding.

DRED
Okay then.

Her attention is forward again.

AGRIPPA
We're almost there. One more dip
should do it.

They dive; colors all around.

DRED
Hold...

AGRIPPA
Dred, we're not stable and the
shields aren't-

DRED

HOLD.

The ship CREAKS and GROANS. Warning lights and alarms.

AGRIPPA

I'm taking us out!

DRED

I SAID HOLD, YOU OVEN-FUCKING SON
OF A-

AGRIPPA

We're going to die!

More alarms, more creaking.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

Dred, I'm still holding and-

DRED

NOW!

EXT. SPACE - GRAV STORM

The far side of the storm.

The Dragonslayer surfaces just in the calm.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The warning lights still flash, but everything is quiet now.
No gravity; everything floats gently.

Claude smiles; Agrippa laughs.

Dred sighs, relaxes.

The gravity comes back on, slowly, so everything drifts to
the floor.

AGRIPPA

Did you call me an oven-fucker?

DRED

I'm gonna go take a nap. Wake me
next week.

AGRIPPA

We've got time. Get your rest.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - COMMON ROOM

Johanna and Swithin play some virtual sports game.

Claude nurses a pot of some hot drink, reading, still strapped in to a wall seat.

Dred walks in, collapses on the sofa.

DRED

Were you playing this the whole time?

JOHANNA

We were trying to when you shut off the gravity.

SWITHIN

She's just angry because I'm beating her now.

DRED

You know what? I don't think I care enough to keep...

She rolls over, tries to sleep.

Zorion appears next to Swithin, blocking his view of the game.

SWITHIN

Excuse me.

ZORION

There's a problem.

She shows a readout to Swithin.

DRED

(muffled)

It can wait.

SWITHIN

It really can't.

Johanna cranes her neck, jumps to see.

JOHANNA

What? What is it?

Dred groans, rolls over. Zorion shows her.

DRED
(leave me alone)
What am I looking at?

She sits up, rubs her eyes.

DRED (CONT'D)
(oh dear god)
What am I looking at?

CUT TO:

Everyone sits around the table with a display of the solar system in front of them.

ZORION
The perpetual gravity storm stops the outside world from getting reliable data within the system, meaning we were basing our plans off of a predicted model - which is what you're looking at now. But...

The display swaps; it's mostly the same, but a few of the planets are a teeeny bit off - notably, Jushurka.

ZORION (CONT'D)
This is what the system currently looks like.

AGRIPPA
I assume this is a bigger difference than our margin of error?

ZORION
For practical purposes, there was no margin of error. The storm stops most outside influences. For Jushurka, our margin was five meters.

JOHANNA
So the planets moved. You aren't telling me they're too far away or something?

ZORION
No. The question becomes, "Why did they move?"

She zooms in on Jushurka, and on Jushur in particular.

Dred squints, stares, examines.

ZORION (CONT'D)
What do you notice here?

JOHANNA
That's the dragon.

Waaaaait a second...

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
Did the dragon move?

ZORION
Jushur's size is significant enough
to alter the orbit of the planet,
yes. But unfortunately, no, he did
not move.

Dred closes her eyes. Prays under her breath.

ZORION (CONT'D)
It would be more accurate to say he
is moving.

DRED
He's awake.

Beat. Silence.

AGRIPPA
Luckily, we're not in any danger
here, right? So we can just leave.
We don't get our treasure, but
we've yet to get to the actual
risk, so-

DRED
No.

AGRIPPA
I know it's unfortunate, but-

DRED
No.

JOHANNA
I'm with Dred. We wait. We can hide
until he leaves. It might even make
things easier. I can adapt the
cloak to-

DRED
That is... an option.

AGRIPPA

Are we in danger? Can he sense us?

JOHANNA

I need warning. If you wanted me to start the cloak, you should've-

SWITHIN

No, we're too small, still too close to the storm.

He looks at Dred.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

Zorion has been combing through all of our records regarding him. He is definitely waking up.

DRED

But he's not awake yet. Not fully.

SWITHIN

No.

Claude understands what's going on. Takes a deep breath.

CLAUDE

Oh.

JOHANNA

What? He can't sense us yet, but if we run he will?

DRED

The convergence... how long before comms are up?

ZORION

Too long. Months.

AGRIPPA

Oh no. Oh no no no. You can't be serious.

JOHANNA

Am I dense? What's going on?

DRED

We have a unique opportunity here. Nobody in the nearest dozen clusters knows more about Jushur than us. And even if they did, nobody is closer than a few months from here.

AGRIPPA

We can't. We are simply incapable of it.

DRED

How many people did he kill last time?

ZORION

(quiet)

5% of the population of the galaxy. 23% of the population of the Federates. 40% of the population of the High Dwarven Systems. 89% of the population of the Tengu, including over 99% of their males. They never recovered.

DRED

If we have a tiny chance of preventing that, don't we have to take it?

JOHANNA

Wait. We're gonna fight him? Like, straight up fight a stellar dragon?

DRED

That's what I'm asking.

Beat.

Johanna WHOOPS.

JOHANNA

YES! Fuck yes! Let's blow this slimeburglar UP.

AGRIPPA

We'll all die. Accomplishing nothing.

SWITHIN

If we can even wound him, it makes the rest of the galaxy's job easier. He's not awake yet-

AGRIPPA

The Knights of the Three Points tried to take him while he was fast asleep; how'd that go for them?

Dred waves him off.

DRED

The Knights brought an armada.

AGRIPPA

And we have one tiny freighter with
no significant weapons systems.

DRED

They couldn't hide, got slaughtered
by drakes. Then when they reached
the planet, its barrier blocked
their orbital laser, which was only
barely functional after getting
through the storm.

CLAUDE

I have many weapons. Large ones.

ZORION

That's correct. As I calculate, our
odds are not good, but they're
better than the Jushurka Crusade.

Agrippa shakes his head.

AGRIPPA

I understand your thinking. I don't
like the idea of doing nothing
either. But there's nothing we can
do. We're an insect fighting a
mountain.

DRED

Once he's awake, nobody can touch
him. Period. Our odds now are
better than the entire galaxy's in
a month.

SWITHIN

Zorion, you're the only one of us
who's immortal. Do you-

ZORION

He killed many Sprites, and he will
kill many more. If sacrificing my
life now saves two lives later, it
would be worth it.

AGRIPPA

Would it save two lives later,
though?

Zorion looks at him. Calculates.

ZORION

Maybe. As Swithin said, even wounding him would be a monumental victory.

Agrippa puts his head on the table.

DRED

We'd need everyone operating at the top of their game. So we won't even try unless everyone is all-in.

She looks at Claude.

CLAUDE

I will do this. You know that I will do this. What a meaningful method to die.

JOHANNA

Speak for yourself. I have no intention of dying, ever, much less here.

SWITHIN

Zorion's done too much for me. If she wants to do this, I want to do it.

Everyone looks at Agrippa.

DRED

Up to you, Agrippa.

AGRIPPA

Should I live the rest of my life trying to calculate how many lives I could've saved, but didn't? Or die pretending to be useful?

He stands up straight. Beat.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

I'm in.

Dred nods.

DRED

How long do we have?

ZORION

It's all a guessing game. A month seems a reasonable guess, but the longer we wait, the higher the risk.

DRED

We'll take one week. One week to come up with a plan. And, you know. Make our peace.

Beat.

She claps, rubs her hands together.

DRED (CONT'D)

Holy shit. Okay. I'm gonna...

Beat.

She walks away.

Beat.

Everyone else shuffles off.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - DRED'S CABIN

Dred sits at her terminal, staring, doing nothing.

Beat.

Zorion appears in the room.

Beat.

Zorion coughs.

DRED

You couldn't knock?

ZORION

It would just be for your comfort. Where I choose to display myself has no true bearing on my actual knowledge. I don't have any more or less awareness of what's happening inside your room right now than I did five minutes ago.

DRED

Wonderful.

Zorion chuckles.

ZORION

I'm not... that sounded like I'm spying on you. I meant to say, despite appearing here, I'm still not really here. It's more like-

Dred looks at her for the first time. Turns to face her.

ZORION (CONT'D)

...Are you okay?

DRED

I'm just... thinking. There's a lot to think about.

Zorion walks over, looks at Dred's screen.

It's a big MESSAGE CANNOT BE SENT to Alex.

ZORION

Oh. Your friend.

DRED

They'll kill him as soon as they realize I'm not coming back.

ZORION

Jushur might kill him as well.

DRED

I mean, maybe.

Beat.

DRED (CONT'D)

It's not... it just sucks.

ZORION

Yes.

Beat.

DRED

What did you want?

ZORION

I have something I want to talk about. But not with Swithin.

DRED

Okay.

ZORION
I am... afraid of dying.

Dred's eyes widen. She lets out of a breath, chuckles.

DRED
Wow. Okay.

ZORION
My prison has never bothered me
before, because I know that I would
otherwise outlive it.

DRED
Or at least until the death of the
universe.

Zorion shakes her head.

ZORION
When the end comes, conditions
change. It would allow me to leave
my prison. Then I would wait with
my people in subspace for the birth
of a new universe.

DRED
Oh. Oh. You're not just immortal,
you're, like... woah.

She nods. Sits in midair.

ZORION
But if sudden, severe damage were
to come to my current prison-

DRED
Swithin's monstrosity on his arm?

Zorion nods.

ZORION
I would... technically survive. But
my memories would not.

DRED
You'd still have your soul-
memories, though, right? That's
what really makes a person
themselves.

She shakes her head.

ZORION

Sprites don't have souls. Or, we are only souls. Either way.

DRED

Shit. I'm learning so much about Sprites in this conversation.

ZORION

We are a private people. But I am afraid. And in all likelihood, you will not survive to share this information.

DRED

Fair. So, what, you want me to comfort you?

Beat.

ZORION

I don't know.

Beat.

DRED

It's like this: I know this is... risky. But I still have no intention of dying.

Zorion looks at her.

DRED (CONT'D)

The rules haven't changed. We've got a unique opportunity, but the second it's clear we can't do anything, we're gonna do what we can to get out alive.

ZORION

Really?

Dred... laughs.

DRED

I don't know. Maybe.

ZORION

Thank you.

Zorion disappears.

Beat.

Dred looks around.

DRED

Really?

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

Agrippa and Johanna stand on the bridge, looking out at a magnified view of Jushurka.

AGRIPPA

Are you ready?

Johanna nods. She holds her hands up, concentrates.

A GOLDEN FLASH flows around the ship.

JOHANNA

It's up.

Agrippa nods. Hits the comms.

AGRIPPA

We're moving.

Flips a switch. The ship starts moving.

JOHANNA

You really don't think we'll do anything?

AGRIPPA

I think... I think we have to try.

JOHANNA

But you don't think trying will accomplish anything.

AGRIPPA

Not in terms of hindering Jushur, no.

Johanna chews on that.

JOHANNA

Even with Claude?

AGRIPPA

How old are you?

Johanna makes a face.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

Let me rephrase. Have you ever seen a stellar dragon attack?

Johanna shakes her head.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

I was young, maybe twenty. It wasn't Jushur, it was another, much smaller. Maybe the size of a city.

Johanna makes an "oh shit" face.

JOHANNA

Kullassina-bel?

Agrippa nods.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

He razed the Gnome homeworld. You were there?

AGRIPPA

It was right after I'd transitioned into my new body.

He gestures to himself.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

It was originally for immortality and stature. I was one of a wave of young gnomes who did it for combat, to defend ourselves. You should've seen us.

He flexes; a gun pops out of his shoulder. It retracts, and a sword extends from his arm. It retracts, and a huge laser extends from his chest.

JOHANNA

That's some hardware.

AGRIPPA

I thought I was invincible, but we didn't even scratch him. I lost everyone in that fight. It was decades before we were able to crush him in a black hole.

JOHANNA

I can make black holes. Very small ones.

Agrippa laughs.

AGRIPPA

This was a very big one. And he
still almost got away.

Johanna walks to the window, rotates the display of Jushurka to get a clearer view of Jushur. He's fucking massive. Black scales, with waves of energy coursing through them.

JOHANNA

Fuck'm. We'll find some way to blow
him to hell.

Beat. Agrippa nods.

AGRIPPA

I guess we have to.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - GYM

Shiny and sleek. Lots of mirrors, would fit in a futuristic strip mall.

Claude spots for Dred.

The mirrors disappear, lights go out. Even the emergency lightning is dim. Dred's weights disintegrate.

Claude looks around.

CLAUDE

What is-

DRED

Shh.

Beat. She listens. It's dead quiet, you can't hear anything. Almost sounds like the ship is off.

DRED (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Quiet.

She gestures. They creep out.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

Dark up here, too. You can barely make out Agrippa and Swithin, hugging a wall.

Johanna stands by the windshield, gold light held in tight fists like she's struggling to hold on to a rope tied to something heavy.

Dred and Claude appear in the doorway; Dred holds up a hand to Claude, slips over to Swithin.

Swithin holds a finger to his lips. "Shh."

Dred nods at Johanna. "What's going on?"

Swithin points out the window. Dred looks.

It takes a second to see it, but there's something moving.

A DRAKE. It's the size of a skyscraper, slithering through space.

Johanna GRUNTS; it echoes through the silent room.

Beat.

Johanna mutters swears.

Beat.

Johanna YANKS. The glow disappears. There's almost no light in the room now.

Beat.

A long beat.

The drake turns towards them.

JOHANNA

Fuck.

All the lights come on at once; Agrippa is already piloting the ship away from the drake.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

I told you! Five megs! This guy is less than two!

DRED

It's fine, get ready to fight.

JOHANNA

We gonna get the big guy's help this time?

Dred looks at Claude. Claude looks caught in the headlights.

Dred looks back at Johanna.

DRED

No. He's big and loud, we need to do this while avoiding any more attention. Can you-

JOHANNA

Singlehandedly kill a drake without being at all noticable?

DRED

No. No heroes on this ship, nothing is singlehanded. Can you whip up a cloak for us? Outside the ship?

She shakes her head.

JOHANNA

For myself, yes.

Dred hesitates.

AGRIPPA

He's getting awfully close.

DRED

Damn it.

She looks at Johanna.

DRED (CONT'D)

No heroics. It gets bad, just say the word, we'll grab you and get the hell out of here.

JOHANNA

Sure thing, mom.

Johanna suits up, charges out the window.

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - CONTINUOUS

The space around Johanna ripples, and she hurtles forward.

EXT. THE DRAKE - CONTINUOUS

Johanna speeds past the drake, which ignores her and continues towards the Dragonslayer.

JOHANNA

Hey! Dicklips!

She moves in front of it, holds up her hands.

It dips right past her, its back skimming her feet.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Don't ignore me!

A sharp black blade appears in her hand. She rams it into the drake's back as it slides along, creating a massive gash.

It ROARS, whips back impossibly fast and swats her with its tail. She goes flying.

It takes her a beat to get control back, and when she does it's right on top of her.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Woah, hey, look at the big ship!

It doesn't. She barely avoids its massive jaws, can't avoid the headbutt, and she goes flying again.

This time, when it closes in on her, she jukes towards it and slips between its teeth, slashing again with her blade. It HOWLS in frustration, but she ducks the tail and gets a cut off on it, too.

She starts to cheer, but then it breathes a BEAM OF ENERGY at her.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

The energy beam almost hits the ship.

DRED

Watch it, Jo, that blast almost got us!

EXT. THE DRAKE

Johanna looks down at her feet. She couldn't dodge the blast completely, and she's missing her left foot, and her right leg below the knee.

JOHANNA

Oh, I'm really sorry about that.
Must be really scary to have almost
been hit.

DRED (O.S.)

Don't need the snark.

Johanna rolls her eyes, dodges another energy beam.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

More energy beams. These ones not anywhere near the Dragonslayer, but they are big and bright.

AGRIPPA

Dred, this guy's drawing attention all by himself.

DRED

Jo, those beams are really bright. Anything you can do about that?

JOHANNA (O.S.)

For fucks sake, I'm one woman!

DRED

I'm coming out.

JOHANNA (O.S.)

You'll just draw more attention, shithead! Won't we all die then?

Dred gets suited up.

DRED

I know you want to do this alone, but-

JOHANNA (O.S.)

There are more coming, I can already see them.

Dred hesitates, looks at Claude.

Claude nods, moves to suit up.

DRED

Okay, Jo, we're gonna-

JOHANNA (O.S.)

What's the policy on heroics again?

Dred freezes.

JOHANNA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You know what? Nevermind, I hated your rules anyway.

DRED

Jo, what are you-

A BRILLIANT FLASH OF LIGHT, as Johanna GLOWS LIKE THE SUN and shoots away from the Dragonslayer.

DRED (CONT'D)
NO! Johanna, STOP, you're gonna-

JOHANNA (O.S.)
Fuck you, Ethel! Fuck all of you!

Johanna cackles like a maniac.

EXT. THE DRAKE - CONTINUOUS

Johanna whizzes past another drake, which turns to follow her. She dodges energy blasts, laughing and glowing and speeding away from everyone at lightning speed.

JOHANNA
I'm the BEST! I'm SO HEROIC!

Another drake; she SLAMS into it, creating a MASSIVE GLOWING SHOCKWAVE.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
Don't try to hide me! I've always
been best with an audience!

She's now got half a dozen drakes following her.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
How many more are there?

Beat.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
How the fuck many, bolthead?

AGRIPPA (O.S.)
You've got everything local
following you.

JOHANNA
Once I'm gone, the cloak only holds
for an hour or two, so you might as
well gun it, okay?

AGRIPPA (O.S.)
Johanna...

JOHANNA
You wanna see very big?

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

They're so far away, but you an still see Johanna's glow.

A BLACK RIPPLE as Johanna EXPLODES INTO A BLACK HOLE, and then there's nothing.

A long,

Long,

Beat.

DRED

You heard her. Gun it.

Beat. Agrippa nods.

The ship rockets forward.

DRED (CONT'D)

Okay, everyone. Timetable just got moved up. Get ready for trouble.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - COMMON ROOM

Dred, Swithin, Zorion, and Claude look at a holo of Jushurka.

DRED

Is there any reason we shouldn't just jump right on top of him?

SWITHIN

Other than the fact that he's a gigantic dragon and we'll all die?

DRED

Other than that.

SWITHIN

Yes.

He swipes a hand, and a shining web appears above the planet.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

This is the defense mesh. All these little glowing points are interface nodes, but this one here-

He points to a particularly tight-knit part of the web near the south pole.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

This is the heart. Zorion and I can get in anywhere there's a node, but if you want us to get in fast, that's where we need to be.

DRED

How fast is fast? And how fast is not fast?

ZORION

Impossible to give hard numbers.

DRED

Give me soft ones then, come on.

ZORION

Minutes versus days.

DRED

That's a lot faster.

Swithin nods.

DRED (CONT'D)

We've got shuttles. We could drop you at the pole and then head to Jushur without you? I don't want to lose what little surprise we have.

Swithin laughs.

DRED (CONT'D)

Something funny?

SWITHIN

You remember what we're doing, right? If you try to do anything before we've gotten through the mesh, you'll have to deal with the planetary defenses.

DRED

...Shit. Okay.

She looks at Swithin.

DRED (CONT'D)

Is this crazy? Should we just turn back?

Swithin takes her question seriously. Examines the planet.

SWITHIN

No, this will work. We might have to deal with some traditional defenses while we're hacking the mesh, but once we have the mesh, it'll work for us.

(MORE)

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

Won't do much against Jushur himself, but it should clear the way for us to focus all of our attention on him.

Claude nods.

CLAUDE

I have fought a planet defended by a mesh such as this one before. More advanced, but similar. Very effective. Even if we are only taking this, it makes Jushur vulnerable hundreds of years from now.

ZORION

He is correct. Taking the mesh, if we are successful, prevents Jushur from remaining in safety and security after his next rampage.

CLAUDE

He will find a new planet to go to.

SWITHIN

And that one won't be surrounded by a grav storm. Either way it's a win for the future of civilization.

Beat. Dred chews on her lip.

DRED

Okay. South pole it is. I'll tell Agrippa.

Agrippa pipes in on comms.

AGRIPPA (O.S.)

I heard. Twenty minutes.

DRED

We going to have company?

AGRIPPA

You should see this.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE

Dred walks over to Agrippa. He gestures behind them.

AGRIPPA

Remember how the cloak was only effective if we stayed below a certain speed?

Dred looks at a dustcloud behind them. It's hard to make out at first, even through a magnified viewport, but then she understands.

DRED

They're swarming.

AGRIPPA

Johanna's display drew them behind us. Instead of in front of us, so it's not like she screwed us; she made it possible to get to the planet. But leaving will be...

DRED

Cross that bridge when we come to it. Or, when it comes to us.

She sighs.

AGRIPPA

I'll get to work calculating if there's an escape route. You should gear up for planetfall.

Dred nods, heads towards belowdeck.

Zorion appears in front of her.

ZORION

There's a problem.

DRED

Oh, good. I was getting worried, things were going so smoothly.

Dred runs.

INT. DONTROL ROOM - COMMON ROOM

Swithin and Zorion look at a display of their landing site - it's swarming with giant serpents and KOBOLDS - little lizard-rat-men.

Claude sits nearby, examining a truly dizzying arsenal, laid out on a table. Pistols and rifles, yeah, but also axes, grenade launchers, something shoulder-mounted that looks like it belongs on a tank.

Dred runs in, sees the holodisplay.

DRED
What am I looking at?

SWITHIN
This is our core node. I figured it would be defended, but not... I was expecting him to rely on automated defenses.

ZORION
To be clear, he likely has those, too.

Swithin nods.

SWITHIN
Which I can deal with. But not while I'm fighting off an army of ankle-biters and giant snakes.

Dred looks at Claude.

DRED
Claude?

He doesn't look, just nods.

CLAUDE
I can handle them.

ZORION
Unfortunately, it's not that easy.

CLAUDE
I did not say it was easy.

Zorion zooms the display out. You'd think there'd be less hostiles further away, but their numbers only seem to increase.

ZORION
The minute we get started, we're swarmed. Even if we could kill twenty of them every second-

CLAUDE
I could do this.

ZORION
-There'd be hundreds left to deal with. Then thousands.

DRED
Plus, it gives up our element of
surprise. What are our options?

Swithin and Zorion look at each other. Back at Dred.

SWITHIN
You aren't going to like it.

DRED
Try me.

Swithin takes off his wrist computer. A tiny hoverpad inside levitates it. It drops to hover just above the ground; Zorion changes her display so she looks like a kobold, and surrounds the computer.

ZORION
Kobolds are dumb. I might be able
to walk right past them all.

DRED
That sounds great. Why wouldn't I
like that?

SWITHIN
Because all those drakes swarming
have formed a big enough
disturbance that the defense mesh
is on yellow. It knows something is
up, defenses are activating. If we
want to pull this off, we have to
draw attention away from the core.

ZORION
Which probably won't work as well
as we need it to, and if it
doesn't, leaves me high and dry.
But it's a risk I'm willing to
take.

Dred shakes her head.

DRED
No. I like our odds better
together.

ZORION
We don't have odds together.

DRED
Claude is-

SWITHIN

Extraordinary. Unstoppable. But not
immovable. He makes a better
battering ram than a wall.

Dred looks at Claude.

He nods, slowly.

CLAUDE

I can kill all of them, maybe. But
not all at the same time.

Dred looks at Zorion, who changes to look like herself again.

Dred is pained.

DRED

I can't... Couldn't one of us do
it? Someone who's not immortal?
Could I do it, somehow?

ZORION

Don't try to be a hero, Dred. I'm
only doing it because I'm the best
choice.

Beat.

DRED

The first sign of something going
wrong, you're gonna book it out of
there?

ZORION

If I do, our entire mission ends in
failure.

DRED

But we survive.

ZORION

Maybe. Our odds of survival are
higher at pretty much every point
if we run, but... Maybe.

Beat. Deep breaths and sighs.

ZORION (CONT'D)

We're getting close.

EXT. THE CORE NODE - DAY

Just like we saw on the display. No visible computers or anything, just tremendous numbers of kobolds and serpents in a variety of camps.

The wrist computer falls from the sky. Lands behind some rocks.

A kobold sees it, gets curious.

It walks over to the rocks.

Peeks behind them.

It sees Zorion in kobold form.

It YELLS in some high-pitched yet guttural language.

Zorion YELLS BACK, LOUDER. She cows it, and it leaves.

A glowing green line in the sky appears directly over Zorion. It... opens, and scans her.

Zorion concentrates, and the line turns golden. Disappears.

ZORION

(quiet)

I'm down. Moving towards the core.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - DAY

Everyone else is on the bridge, burning across the sky, high up in the atmosphere.

Several glowing lines appear below and behind them, trying to scan them.

SWITHIN

We have the system's attention.

Swithin swipes rapidly at a holodisplay, gestures towards the lines, turns them blue as fast as they show up.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

It's been a long time since I did something like this without her.

DRED

Are we okay?

SWITHIN

We should be fine for now. It's only the local systems that have picked us up, I'm keeping the global mesh in the dark. We're fine.

A RED WARNING LIGHT.

AGRIPPA

Missile lock!

SWITHIN

Local systems might have some defenses though.

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - CONTINUOUS

A missile materializes from one of the lines, rushes towards the Dragonslayer.

Just before impact, it flashes blue, and drops from the sky.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Swithin doesn't miss a beat, just keeps working faster and faster.

AGRIPPA

That was a little close.

SWITHIN

We're fine as long as it sticks with one at a time. I can handle-

Another MISSILE LOCK warning.

AGRIPPA

We've got another... oh no.

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - CONTINUOUS

No fewer than eight missiles materialize.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

AGRIPPA

I'm putting full grav to maneuvering!

Everyone grabs on to something as the ship lurches hard.

EXT. THE CORE NODE - DAY

Zorion wanders around the camp. Every once in a while, she waves a hand and reveals a holodisplay. She hits some buttons, then it disappears. Rinse, repeat.

The kobold that found her originally watches her, sneaks behind her.

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - DAY

The ship dips and dodges, narrowly avoiding the missiles a couple times.

One of the missiles turns blue, drops out of the sky. Another missile materializes in its place.

SWITHIN (O.S.)
Zor, the faster the better!

EXT. THE CORE NODE - DAY

Zorion deals with another display, peeks over her shoulder at the kobold tailing her.

ZORION
I'm going as fast as I can, but I
have company.

The kobold draws a nasty looking knife. Nods towards her, and half a dozen more pop up around her, two of them riding serpents.

ZORION (CONT'D)
Oh. A lot of company.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - DAY

Dred, strapped into the wall, looks at a display of Zorion's situation.

DRED
Zorion, get out of there!

SWITHIN
Is she in trouble?

ZORION (O.S.)

I'm almost done! Just one more-

The kobolds attack. She has to run, but they're surprisingly fast, and once she's running more start chasing.

DRED

Damn it!

An EXPLOSION rocks the ship.

AGRIPPA

We're hit!

SWITHIN

I know it was our goal, but, we've got too much attention! We need something to draw them off!

DRED

I'll get in the shuttle, and-

CLAUDE

No.

Claude unstraps himself from the wall. Stands steady despite the rocking of the ship.

DRED

Claude, you can't-

Claude puts a hand on her shoulder.

Beat.

She shakes her head.

DRED (CONT'D)

No. You're our best shot against Jushur. You're our only-

He holds out a hand. Materializes a gigantic bomb, bigger than Dred.

CLAUDE

It will not penetrate his skin. Mouth is the best entry point.

He shrugs.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)

Not only entry point.

Dred grits her teeth. Looks away.

Claude stretches. Walks to the window.

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - DAY

Missiles all around.

Claude LEAPS out of the ship. Lets off several shots with a pair of cannon-sized pistols, and hits each of the missiles dead on; they explode in mid-air.

Claude keeps falling. More missiles appear, but smaller ones, aimed at him.

He shoots them out of the sky as quickly as they appear.

A huge cone of fire and death extends up into the air above him as he drops to the planet. Missiles explode as soon as they appear. It's beautiful.

EXT. THE CORE NODE - DAY

Zorion zips around the battlefield, moving like some sort of ghost - which, she kind of is. She dodges spears and knives and bites, and retaliates with arms like blades, but it's a losing battle, and she's getting cornered.

A thrown spear in SLOW MOTION. It has deadly aim, but luckily, Zorion isn't really real, and it goes right through her.

Inside her illusion, though, the spear is still headed right for her computer - her real self. She's barely able to wheel it out of the way, but the spear still manages to catch one of the straps and pin it to the ground.

Back to REAL TIME.

Zorion's illusion jerks like it was just yanked by a chain, falls to the ground on top of the computer.

The kobolds and serpents surround her, spears to her throat.

In the distance, a massive cone of fire grows from the sky to the ground. The dull BOOM of repeated explosions reaches them, distracts them.

One BIG EXPLOSION as the cone touches the ground. The shockwave can even be felt here.

Everyone's attention is there.

Everyone except the first kobold that noticed her. He stabs a spear STRAIGHT THROUGH THE COMPUTER. Zorion SCREAMS, disappears.

The kobold's head EXPLODES.

All around her, kobolds die. One serpent SCREECHES, only for a harpoon to slide straight into its mouth.

Claude, a WHIRLING MAELSTROM OF MURDER, bounces around the battlefield, light as a feather with a machine gun.

Guns materialize in his hands, fire, only to dematerialize as soon as he's done with them. A shotgun for this serpent that's close, a rifle for a kobold that's far away, grenade beneath his feet as he leaps away from a whole group...

He takes his own licks. A kobold gets a spear into his arm; he takes the spear and skewers the kobold with it. A serpent latches onto his leg, and he flops to crush the serpent, then tucks into a roll and shoots another.

By the time he lands next to the computer, everything in the immediate area is dead.

Claude looks at the damaged computer. His face is contorted in the bloodlust, but he grimaces, holds on to himself.

He scoops up the computer. Zorion appears next to him, hazy, distorted. She gestures.

ZORION

Get me over there.

Claude looks around.

A dull THUNDERING - more enemies almost on top of them. Additionally, several glowing lines appear above them.

CLAUDE

We do not have time.

ZORION

I've almost got it.

Claude carries her over where she said.

ZORION (CONT'D)

Here. You can go.

The kobolds are on top of them.

Claude shoots a few, looks at her.

She struggles, manages to open a node.

ZORION (CONT'D)

GO.

Claude leaps away, and they all give chase, leaving Zorion alone.

She flickers. Reaches for the node.

EXT. JUSHURKA FROM SPACE

A BLUE FLARE at the south pole; the entire green defense mesh glows, as the blue climbs across it to the north pole.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - DAY

The few missiles tailing them dematerialize.

Everyone laughs and cheers.

AGRIPPA

They did it! I'll circle around and pick them up.

Swithin SLAMS a fist into the wall.

SWITHIN

Fffffff...FUCK.

Tears in his eyes.

Dred shakes her head. Agrippa's worried.

AGRIPPA

Swithin? Are you...

SWITHIN

Zorion is gone.

Beat.

AGRIPPA

I'll... circle to Claude.

CLAUDE (O.S.)

Do not. There is too much here. I am-

Beat.

AGRIPPA
Claude! Claude!

Dred clenches her fists.

DRED
Claude is... This is what he came
for. We head to Jushur.

She grips the bomb.

DRED (CONT'D)
We've got the bomb, I've got some
weapons programs, I know Swithin
has something.

Beat. Swithin pushes emotion away.

He examines a display.

SWITHIN
We've got the defense mesh, now.
It's pretty old, but I should be
able to get us something that can
drill through his armor. How are we
delivering the bomb?

AGRIPPA
I'll go load it in a shuttle.

DRED
We don't have long. All surprise is
gone. Jushur's probably already
stirring.

Agrippa lifts the bomb with surprising ease, carries it off.
Dred takes the helm.

DRED (CONT'D)
Heading towards the big guy. Do we
have eyes on him?

SWITHIN
Putting him on screen.

An image of Jushur on the monitor. It's an aerial shot, but
he doesn't fit in the whole image. He's so fucking big.

He shifts, shakes. He's waking up, and he's pissed.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)
I'll let him know we're coming.

A storm of missiles and lasers shower Jushur. He looks straight up, ROARS - the roar echoes through the ship a beat later.

DRED

Um, is he-

EXT. JUSHURKA FROM SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Jushur raises his head, breathes a huge beam of stellar energy straight up. It TEARS THROUGH the defense mesh, leaving a huge gap above him.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

DRED

Well, shit.

Swithin SCREAMS at the display. MORE MISSILES fire from the nodes all around Jushur.

EXT. JUSHURKA FROM SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Jushur arches his back. Unfurls glowing, delicate wings the size of continents. One mighty flap, and he's off the planet; another, and he's soaring away.

The huge swarm of drakes follows after him, but the mesh reaches out to stop them.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Swithin has recovered himself and frantically hits buttons.

SWITHIN

Shit.

DRED

I'm going after the big guy.

SWITHIN

NO!

Dred looks at him.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

The drakes will rip us to shreds if I can't stop them, and I can only control the mesh in atmo.

DRED
He's getting away!

Swithin stands, his display following him.

SWITHIN
You go. I'll stay here.

DRED
Swithin, I have lost-

SWITHIN
I HAVE LOST EVERYTHING.

He can't hold back the tears, but otherwise he has complete control. Doesn't even look up from the screen.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)
Let me have this.

Beat.

DRED
FUCK!

Swithin kicks a button on the floor, suits up.

Flicks his eyes up to meet Dred's for just a beat.

SWITHIN
Get him.

He flips backwards out of the window.

Dred pulls up hard, leaving the atmosphere in a second.

DRED
Agrippa! Where the hell is my bomb!

She panics, looks back.

DRED (CONT'D)
Shit! Swithin, I still need you to
make me a gun!

Beat.

DRED (CONT'D)
Damn it!

Agrippa runs in.

AGRIPPA
What's going on? Where's Swithin?

DRED
Hold on! Full grav to propulsion!

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - CONTINUOUS

The Dragonslayer flies away from Jushurka.

ZOOM OUT to show Jushur already halfway to the grav storm.

The Dragonslayer shudders, then BLASTS FORWARD at impossible speed.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

They're going faster than Jushur now, catching up.

Dred and Agrippa are pinned to the rear wall by the acceleration.

AGRIPPA
I'm turning the dampeners back on!

DRED
No! We're almost there!

AGRIPPA
You're blacking out!

DRED
I'm... not..

She is. Her eyes roll back.

Agrippa looks ahead. They're almost to Jushur.

Dred goes limp

AGRIPPA
Damn it. Damn it.

He holds on. Closer...

Closer...

Agrippa hits a button. Gravity on the bridge returns to normal.

Dred collapses, slowly comes to.

Agrippa takes control of the ship.

EXT. JUSHUR

The Dragonslayer is like a flea next to him. They're closing in on the grav storm.

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Dred is conscious, but still sits on the floor.

AGRIPPA

When he gets to the storm, he's gone. Dragons are born in grav storms, we'd be on his home turf.

DRED

Speak for yourself.

AGRIPPA

That response doesn't make sense.

DRED

I'll take the shuttle, fly it right up his asshole.

AGRIPPA

No heroes! I've got it set up to autopilot. We can control it from here.

DRED

In the middle of a grav storm?

AGRIPPA

No, but if we get to him before-

Everything shakes and explodes. Vacuum fills the bridge. An emergency suit pops up around Dred.

The bridge is crushed, like a wall just ran into it.

DRED

WHAT. THE.

AGRIPPA

He noticed us! Hang on!

Agrippa hits some buttons. Grabs onto Dred, leaps out of the window as a massive claw looms closer.

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - CONTINUOUS

Jushur casually swats it; it explodes.

Agrippa and Dred float away from the explosion like debris.

ON DRED AND AGRIPPA

Dred looks behind them in despair.

DRED

No...

AGRIPPA

We don't have time.

DRED

We don't have anything.

AGRIPPA

Hang on.

Foot thrusters carry them towards some debris.

As they get closer, you can see it's not just debris - it's the bomb.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

We can't catch up to him, though.
Maybe if I detonate my power core,
you can ride the wave-

Dred is filled with resolve. This is the end, and she's going to go out with a bang.

She climbs out of Agrippa's arms and onto his back.

DRED

Fuck that. Get us to the grav
storm.

AGRIPPA

Dred, we don't have a ship. We'll
be torn to shreds.

DRED

Gimme that joystick.

AGRIPPA

You're gonna... pilot... me?

DRED

Hold on to my bomb.

AGRIPPA

He's still too fast!

DRED
Get me. To. The storm!

Agrippa's foot thrusters kick into gear. They head to the storm, watch Jushur disappear into it.

The joystick pops out of Agrippa's back. Dred grabs on.

AGRIPPA
It's been an honor.

DRED
What are you talking about?

AGRIPPA
Working with you for one last time.

DRED
No last time. We'll go get a beer after this, you can-

AGRIPPA
Dred.

Beat.

Dred looks at Agrippa. She yields.

DRED
Okay. Okay. Fuck it.

She looks up. They're almost into the storm.

DRED (CONT'D)
Let's be heroes.

They hit the storm.

EXT. JUSHUR

Jushur flies through the storm, weaving among the currents. He's graceful, fluid. Natural.

EXT. DRED AND AGRIPPA

Dred HOLLERS AND CHEERS. She rides riptide gravity currents, narrowly dodging debris and adeptly slipping through shifts in the flow.

They're rocketing along way too fast, but if they were going any slower they wouldn't be GAINING ON JUSHUR.

AGRIPPA
 (only a little panicked)
 Big drop coming up!

DRED
 I know!

AGRIPPA
 How can you- LOOK OUT!

They almost get creamed by a huge piece of junk, but the current drops and yanks them out of the way in the nick of time.

DRED
 Arm the bomb!

AGRIPPA
 Once it's armed, any impact will-

DRED
 (excited)
 ARM IT!

Agrippa arms it. It glows red.

DRED (CONT'D)
 WHOOOOOO-

EXT. JUSHUR

Jushur reaches the huge pool that almost got the Dragonslayer on the trip in. It slows him down.

Enough that Dred and Agrippa reach his tail.

He notices. Tries to swat at them with his tail, but the grav currents limit his movement.

They reach his back claws. He grasps at them, but a shift in the current lets them slide right between his fingers and up towards his belly.

ON DRED AND AGRIPPA

AGRIPPA
 Etheldred. This may not be a good time, but-

DRED
 I'm busy here!

They narrowly dodge Jushur's front claw.

AGRIPPA

I just wanted you to know I hold you in the utmost respect. Frankly, an unrealistic amount of respect.

DRED

Thanks, I'm the best!

AGRIPPA

So while any other living thing in the universe would die here, I fully expect you to find some way out.

DRED

What? Out of an exploding dragon?

AGRIPPA

Out of the storm.

They're parallel with Jushur's head now. An eye the size of a city stares at them.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

Sorry about this!

Agrippa's joystick retracts; he spins and kicks Dred off of him.

Still hugging the bomb, he hurtles towards Jushur.

Jushur turns his head, but Agrippa is too close now. He slips expertly right into Jushur's tear duct.

Dred flops through the storm, barely manages to grab onto some passing debris.

The bomb EXPLODES.

EXT. SPACE

The far side of the storm.

A long beat.

Dred drifts through the void, unconscious.

A shape behind her.

It's a SHIP - a large gunship, spiky and intimidating.

Dred comes to; doesn't notice the ship yet.

DRED
What the...

She blinks a couple times. Remembers what happened.

DRED (CONT'D)
Agrippa! What-

She looks around. Sees the ship. Her comms light up.

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.)
Hey, Dred. You doing okay?

Dred makes a face: "What the fuck are you doing here?"

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Where's my money, Dred?

DRED
There is no money. It's all still
on the planet.

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.)
I've got Alex here with me. Say hi,
Alex!

Beat.

INT. BLACK MARK GUNSHIP - CONTINUOUS

The hooded figure stands next to Alex, who's chained to the floor.

The hooded figure gestures. Alex is SHOCKED, lets out a GUTTERAL MOAN.

HOODED FIGURE
That'll do.

DRED (O.S.)
Let him go!

HOODED FIGURE
We had a deal, Dred! Then you went
incommunicado, and I had to
improvise if I wanted a reason not
to do my part and kill your friend.

EXT. SPACE - ON DRED - CONTINUOUS

Dred pats herself down, looking for something, anything that might help.

DRED
You're such an altruist.

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.)
You know what? At this point it's looking like he's more useful to me than you. I'm thinking maybe I blow you out of the sky and make him pay me back.

A new voice on comms.

EDELFRID (O.S.)
Not so fast, dustlicker.

A small Dwarven WARSHIP jumps out of subspace directly across from the Black Marks' gunship. It's bulky and armored, with a huge cannon down its spine.

EDELFRID (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Etheldred and her companion are both under my care at the moment, as is this rather large gun that's currently pointed at you.

DRED
Edelfrid?! What the hell?

INT. DWARVEN WARSHIP - CONTINUOUS

Edelfrid stands next to the CAPTAIN and two copilots. She nods at Dred.

EDELFRID
Looks like your trip went about as well as I expected.

DRED (O.S.)
Better, actually. Well, worse, by most measurements.

Edelfrid is confused.

CAPTAIN
Hm. Ma'am?

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.)
 What the hell does that mean? You
 do have money?

DRED (O.S.)
 I saved both of your asses. You
 should be competing to see who can
 give me more kudos.

EDELFRID
 Explain.

CAPTAIN
 Ma'am, you really need to see this.

EDELFRID
 (to the captain)
 What is it?

CAPTAIN
 I'm getting a strange-

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.)
 HOLY FUCK!

EXT. SPACE - ON DRED - CONTINUOUS

Behind Dred, a massive, world-ending shadow in the grav
 storm.

The gunship spins to point at it, weapons glowing.

Dred looks behind her.

DRED
 Oh, come on!

EDELFRID (O.S.)
 Dred, get to the airlock! Engage
 shields, activate-

Jushur emerges from the storm. He burns with angry energy.
 Where his right eye used to be is instead a massive charred
 crater twenty kilometers wide and several kilometers deep. It
 looks like it goes all the way down to his brain.

He ROARS, and a wave of energy ripples off of his skin,
 blowing all of them back.

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
IT DIDN'T WORK!

DRED
Edelfrid! Shoot it!

EDELFRID (O.S.)
We see the shot!

The Dwarven ship's cannon suddenly EXTENDS to twice its length, and a spiral glow wraps around it.

Jushur opens his mouth; his gullet glows with a growing energy blast.

The warship FIRES. The cannon HAMMERS BACK with the recoil as a massive energy quarrel shoots out at light speed.

It's a DIRECT HIT; Jushur's head JERKS, and IMPLODES as his entire skull liquefies into magma and shoots out of his mouth, nostrils, and eyes.

Jushur SPASMS; falls back into the grav storm.

A long beat.

Dred LAUGHS UNCONTROLLABLY.

DRED
SUCK IT! SUCK IT! SUCK IT!

Beat.

DRED (CONT'D)
YEEEEEEAAAAAHHHHHH!!!

SUPER: THE DRAGONSLAYERS

ROLL CREDITS

AS CREDITS ROLL:

INT. DWARVEN WARSHIP - AIRLOCK

Pristine and tidy. Edelfrid and a medical officer await Dred, who hovers in the airlock as it repressurizes.

As soon as it does, she collapses to the ground.

Edelfrid and the medical officer run in and take her helmet off.

She's still laughing.

INT. DWARVEN WARSHIP - BRIDGE

The ship faces the Black Marks' gunship. Edelfrid stands, back to the window.

EDELFRID

While it would now be trivial to convince the Throne to repay Etheldred's debts, it also wouldn't be too difficult to convince them the Black Marks are a direct threat to a Dwarven Champion.

She looks over her shoulder.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)

And I think you know what that would mean.

The hooded figure is back to his calm self.

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.)

Why don't I send the Champion's cohort over to you now, as a gesture of goodwill and peaceful intentions?

Edelfrid smirks.

EDELFRID

That sounds like a wonderful start.

INT. DWARVEN WARSHIP - MEDICAL BAY

Dred, bandaged and bruised, is examined by the medical officer.

Alex is helped inside by another aide.

Dred jumps off the table, tearing open some stitches the medic had been working on. She wraps Alex in a deep embrace; he hugs her back.

EXT. DWARVEN AMPITHEATRE - DAY

Dred stands on stage with a massive Gnome, a pair of elderly goblins, a young elf, a glowing golden tree with a face, and a vicious Ogre king.

Dred receives a medal around her neck from the Dwarven King; the others get medals in small boxes.

INT. MASSIVE MANSION - DAY

Edelfrid leads Dred and Alex inside; it's all marble gilded with precious metals. Fit for an empress.

DRED
Ho-lee... this is for me?

Alex wanders off.

EDELFRID
Technically, it's shared among all living Dwarven Champions. Seeing as you're the first Champion in centuries, though...

Dred's mind is blown.

Alex runs back to them.

ALEX
Dred! We've got a pool full of wine!

Dred's eyes widen. She runs after him.

Edelfrid laughs, walks behind them.

Over on the wall next to the entrance, a long series of names are inscribed.

The most recent ones:

AGRIPPA MURENA

SWITHIN OAKES

ZORION OF THE SPRITES

JOHANNA

CLAUDE LARUE

And finally, ETHELDRED OV ESMOND

FADE OUT

POST CREDITS:

EXT. JUSHURKA - DAY

A shuttle lands, and a dozen armed Dwarven GUARDS jump out, followed by Dred, followed by dozen more guards.

The guards all aim their guns at a MASSIVE DRAKE CORPSE the size of a skyscraper.

DRED

Guys, cool it! It's dead. Come on,
the bulk of the artifacts looked
like they were over-

Something shifts; everyone's silent.

Dred draws a pistol.

A dull ROAR.

GUARD 1

I thought the scans said this area
was clear!

DRED

Shit.

GUARD 2

Quiet! It's coming from-

Another ROAR, but this one sounds more like...

A SNORE?

They creep around the serpent to find:

CLAUDE, fast asleep, leaning against the side of the serpent.

Dred barks a laugh.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END