

THE DRAGONSLAYERS

written by

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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 Ursos?

He nods. Dred relaxes.

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

Lew's confused.

LEW
Even though the cops confiscated the cash?

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

DRED
What cash?

LEW
The cash. Ursos's payment.

DRED

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

LEW

Dred, you gotta tell them where Ursos put the stuff. 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

DAMN IT.

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. 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

My name is 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

Are we finished?

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 any servants or-

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...

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Dred stands on a hovering sidewalk at least a mile in the sky. Holographic "roads" crisscross the sky and shift according to some invisible pattern.

Dred leans on a handrail; MAX (17), her human half-brother, paces in front of her.

Max is taller than Dred, maybe 5'8". Short hair and a feeble attempt at a mustache.

Something is CHIMING.

MAX
I haven't been able to reach him. I
figured he'd gone to ground.

DRED
You don't know all his numbers.
He's pretty easy to find if he'd
just ANSWER HIS PHONE.

She glares at her wrist-mounted computer - the source of the chiming.

An error message pops up: ACCOUNT DELETED.

DRED (CONT'D)
Shit.

A seven-foot tall HOODED FIGURE in a black robe walks over; Dred doesn't notice, but Max does, and his eyes bug out.

DRED (CONT'D)
There are no logs or warrants, so
he wasn't arrested.

You can't see the hooded figure's 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 stands up straight. Eyes dead ahead; she can't bring herself to look at him.

DRED

Do you?

HOODED FIGURE

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

DRED

So you don't have him.

The figure chuckles; he has an endearing laugh.

HOODED FIGURE

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

MAX

Not here, at least.

HOODED FIGURE

Hopefully not anywhere. Gods' Maw, kid, we saw what happened.

(to Dred)

You failed miserably, but it's not like you're stiffing us on purpose.

Dred finally looks at him.

DRED

So what, 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.

 MAX
Does it matter? You can't reach her
there, so-

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

 DRED
You do have him.

The hooded figure shrugs.

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

The figure starts to leave, then turns.

 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.

Beat.

 DRED
We have to do it.

 MAX
Do what?

She walks away.

Max is worried he knows what she's talking about.

 MAX (CONT'D)
Dred. Do what?

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 and Max sit across from the arguing dwarf and elf.

MAX

It wasn't ever serious.

DRED

I was serious.

MAX

I know, but it's like... working out with a goal of benching a thousand pounds. You plan like it's real, but that doesn't mean-

DRED

I bet I could bench a thousand pounds. If I, like, dedicated myself to it a hundred percent?

MAX

You're super wrong, and also that is so not the point.

Edelfrid walks up to them. COUGHS.

Dred stands up, ready to go. Max is slower.

DRED

Let's do it.

EDELFRID

He isn't with you, is he?

DRED

My brother? Yes.

Edelfrid shakes her head.

EDELFRID
I came here to retrieve you.
Maximilian isn't covered under the-

MAX
You can just call me Max.

Edelfrid remembers herself.

EDELFRID
Oh, certainly. My name is Edelfrid,
I'm your sister's caretaker.

She shakes his hand. He laughs.

MAX
Yeah, I know.

DRED
He's my blood brother.

EDELFRID
He's not your father's son.

DRED
I won't leave without him.

Edelfrid looks at him.

Sigh.

EDELFRID
We can't house him. Once we arrive,
he'll need to find his own
accommodations.

Dred starts walking to the boarding area.

DRED
He'll just crash with me.

Max follows her.

EDELFRID
That's not-

DRED
It'll be fine.

Edelfrid sighs, follows them.

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.

Max sits near a window, watches the stars pass.

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

MAX
(welcome to my life)
She is very serious.

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 and Max both stare at her.

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, assuming Max won't come.

Max barks a laugh.

Edelfrid sighs.

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. It's covered in a weird green laser-net.

DRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Then, of course, the planet itself
has top-of-the-line security. I'm
talking holoproduction facilities
that could take down a fleet. 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.

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 the cost versus
the payoff. 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. 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)

...Five percent.

EDELFRID

Sixty 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 script kiddie.

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.

The figure sighs.

HOODED FIGURE
 Gee, I wonder who you're referring
 to.

DRED (O.S.)
 If you want your money, I need
 Alex.

HOODED FIGURE
 I guess we aren't getting our
 money, then, because you aren't
 getting Alex.

DRED (O.S.)
 A-ha! So you do have him!

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)
 Even if did have him, I
 wouldn't-

Beat. The hooded figure groans.

DRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 If you don't have him, why hasn't
 he contacted me?

HOODED FIGURE
 Not my job to convince you of
 anything. If that's all, I'm gonna
 go.

MAX (O.S.)
 Wait!

INT. DWARVEN CALL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

It's like a phone booth for William Randolph Hearst - if he had ten times as much money.

Max has just burst in with Dred, he stands in front of a screen with a cute little chibi icon of the hooded figure.

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.)

Hey, Max.

DRED

What are you doing?

MAX

(to the screen)

Just, hold on a second, okay?

Beat. Max gathers himself. Looks at Dred.

MAX (CONT'D)

Can you really do this?

DRED

Of course I can.

MAX

No, but, I mean, really. How confident are you that you pull this off?

DRED

Hundred and one percent.

HOODED FIGURE

Guys, look, I've got a lot-

MAX

Please, I just need...

A SIGH from the computer.

MAX (CONT'D)

I need to know that you know that this is completely insane.

DRED

I know it looks completely insane. I do. But I've been planning this since I was a kid, when dad told me stories, before you were born. I've planned, I've researched.

(MORE)

DRED (CONT'D)
 I'm supposed to pretend it's so uncertain, but to me, it's already done. All that's left is going through the trouble.

MAX
 Dammit. Dammit.

DRED
 Why? What's wrong?

Max turns to the computer.

MAX
 If you did have Alex. And you don't have to tell us if you do or not. But if you did. Would you be willing to trade him for me?

DRED
 Max-

MAX
 (to Dred)
 You need him for your plan, right?

DRED
 Yeah, but-

MAX
 (to the Hooded Figure)
 What do you say? I know Dred and Alex are tight, but I'm her actual brother.

INT. ATMOSPHERIC OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The Hooded Figure paces, thinks. Stops.

HOODED FIGURE
 Without admitting if we have him or not-

DRED (O.S.)
 Oh, come on, we all know you have him.

The hooded figure sighs.

HOODED FIGURE
 Fine whatever. Yeah, we have him.

A muted swear from Dred.

DRED
Cool it, big guy. Give him a second.

HOODED FIGURE
Geez, Hector. Have a heart.

Alex is confused; he wasn't privy to the arrangement.

ALEX
What's going on?

Dred and Max look at each other. They put their hands on each others' shoulders.

DRED
It's not too late to change your mind.

MAX
Don't say that. You know I'm the one who thinks you're gonna die.

ALEX
Why is anyone dying?

DRED
Then why-

MAX
Because you don't think you're gonna die. I think you're nuts. But if you're sure this will work... prove me wrong.

Dred squeezes his shoulders. Tears up.

She keeps looking at Max, but she's talking to the Hooded Figure.

DRED
You're gonna take care of him, right?

HOODED FIGURE
As long as we think you're coming back, yeah.

ALEX
Wait wait wait, no. Don't do this, I'll go back-

Max slips out of Dred's grip, walks to the minotaur.

MAX
Let's do it.

ALEX
Dred, you can't let him-

MAX
She can't stop me. Don't be a hero.

DRED
Never.

They board the ship.

HOODED FIGURE
Tootles.

The Hooded Figure disappears.

Alex stares at Dred.

ALEX
What are we doing? What are you
doing?

DRED
We're doing it.

She walks away. Alex follows.

ALEX
Doing... it? It?

DRED
Get me a crew. I need the best you
can find.

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 want to reiterate one more time
how much I disapprove of all of
this.

DRED (V.O.)
I'm not gonna bother reiterating
how little I care.

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's VO SIGHS.

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

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

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.

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

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; he's 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; fifty insect-people man 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 go 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... certain-deathish.

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

SWITHIN
 "In our favor" meaning, 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 plays a chess-like game against a dwarf in a stereotypical pointy wizard's hat. He laughs.

DRED
No, I'm serious.

The dwarf laughs harder. Guffaws.

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
Same to you. Assholes.

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.

Beat.

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.

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 twiddles 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 clammers 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, her back to Johanna. Dred 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 moon if I had the
time.

 DRED
You can't cloak a moon.

 JOHANNA
You can't cloak a moon.

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 Jushurka.

JOHANNA

Like, the Jushurka?

Johanna considers, honestly considers, but shakes her head.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

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 it have a solar defense network?

Dred sits next to Johanna again.

DRED

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

Hm. This is interesting.

JOHANNA

That's enough to keep everybody out. But if it wasn't... 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 looks uncomfortable.

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 and Alex. 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

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

Yes! How are you, Alex?

ALEX

Still breathing.

The speaking bot moves closer to Alex.

AGRIPPA

I told you she was trouble.

Dred waits, frustrated, but willing to let them talk.

ALEX

Honestly, if not for her, I would've been fried 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, Alex sits in a very comfortable chair 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? Old ones, 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

Good. I'd hate to think you were
going to get yourself killed. Well,
it sounds like you've got things
well in hand, and I have things to
do, so-

ALEX

Agrippa.

AGRIPPA

Yes?

Alex looks at Dred. Back at Agrippa.

ALEX

The Black Marks have Max.

Agrippa freezes.

AGRIPPA

What did you do, Dred?

Dred opens her mouth to respond, but Alex interrupts.

ALEX

Not her, me. I got caught. He traded himself so I could help her out with this.

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 could set me up for life.

DRED
Is this a jab? Set you up for life,
because it's a suicide mission?

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
Am I missing something? I knew
you'd be willing, but...

AGRIPPA
If you do this on your own, it'll
be the death of Max. And I can't
have that on my conscience.

He stops. The screens dim. He looks at Dred.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
Please. Let me help you. Not for
me, not for you. For him.

Dred wants to say no, but...

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
Fair warning, 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 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 in a small holo, apparently 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. And that is what it is.

Beat.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)

I understand that we are fighting a dragon?

DRED

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

Claude nods. "Looks like you're sane." But he is a little disappointed.

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 am sure you will be fair. Or else I will kill you, probably.

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

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, 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 a readout.

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. CUSHY CELL - NIGHT

The laser bars over the window make it obvious this is a prison cell, but otherwise it looks like a pretty nice studio apartment. It's got a bed, large holodisplay, a computer terminal in the corner.

Max sits at the computer.

A KNOCK at the door, and the hooded figure enters the room.

HOODED FIGURE

So how's the planning going? They got the team put together?

MAX
It's going fine. They've got everyone.

HOODED FIGURE
Who'd you get? Anyone I know?

Max laughs.

MAX
Yes.

Beat. The hooded figure taps his foot.

MAX (CONT'D)
Claude.

HOODED FIGURE
Claude who? Claude...

He freezes. Beat.

MAX
Yeah. That Claude.

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

HOODED FIGURE
Bullshit.

MAX
It's true. Why?

HOODED FIGURE
Prove it.

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

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

The hooded figure stumbles backwards.

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

He looks at Max, who's confused.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)
They're really doing it, aren't they?

MAX

...Yes?

HUGE sigh of relief.

HOODED FIGURE

Oh thank god. What in tarnation.

MAX

Why? What did you think...

He puts two and two together.

MAX (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.

The full situation hits him.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)

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

He laughs.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)

She really, uh... she dreams big.

He pats Max on the shoulder.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)

You too, I guess. Good luck.

MAX

Good luck, you hope we succeed?

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!

Johanna stomps on board. Dred shakes her head.

Alex walks up. Takes a breath.

ALEX

So.

DRED

I'll be fine. Relax.

ALEX

I'm not going to relax.

Dred chuckles.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I want to tell you I'll take care of Max, but-

DRED
It's cool. I'm coming back.

ALEX
But if you don't, I don't think I
can-

DRED
Alex. I know. I wouldn't expect you
to go up against the Marks single-
handedly.

She looks at his stump, smirks at her pun.

ALEX
Ha-ha. But I will. I'll just, you
know. Probably die horribly.

Dred gets serious.

DRED
No. No heroes.

ALEX
I know that's the slogan, Dred, but
it's Max. Come on.

DRED
No. No heroes, no exceptions. You
dying doesn't do anything to help
Max.

Alex sighs. Looks away.

ALEX
Shit. Fine. Just come back, so this
is all moot.

DRED
That's the plan.

She puts a hand on his shoulder. He reciprocates.

Neither of them knows what to say, but they both know what
the other wants to say.

They release. Drew boards the ship.

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 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 scowls.

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?

Edelfrid 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, Max 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.

AGRIPPA

Actually-

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. 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 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.

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 next week.

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 astral for a while. And we don't need comms.

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, that we can see but 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, like she'd been there all along.

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
I offended her.

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

AGRIPPA
Yes, but...

DRED
She's just homesick.

AGRIPPA
Homesick?

He looks out the window; understands.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
I didn't think about that. She must
hate subspace travel.

SWITHIN (O.S.)
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, a little glimpse of home was the only way I survived the night.

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.

He leaves.

INT. ATMOSPHERIC OFFICE - DAY

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

HOODED FIGURE

Bring him in.

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

MAX

Look, relax. Everything is fine.

HOODED FIGURE

I didn't bring you here because of that.

MAX

This is about Dred, right? She hit a convergence-

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.

Max looks uneasy.

MAX

...Yeah.

HOODED FIGURE

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

MAX

What did you want, then?

HOODED FIGURE

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

Max 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 Max's face.

HOODED FIGURE (CONT'D)

Interestingly enough, so does your sister.

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.

(MORE)

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

I have more flying experience than you, even if less of it is in a storm.

DRED

A lot 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 shit.

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 hell, 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-HUMPING 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 say something about me and ovens?

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

AGRIPPA
We've got time. Get your rest.

INT. EDELFRID'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Edelfrid talks to a small hologram on her desk - ALEX.

EDELFRID
You still haven't heard from her?

Alex stiffens.

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

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

ALEX
I told you, 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.

Edelfrid sighs.

LORD THYRFAR
I understand you were close.
Honestly, I liked her, too. But she
was going dragon hunting. She was
never going to come home.

Alex doesn't crack.

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

Edelfrid sighs. She's not happy about this.

EDELFRID
My superiors have been discussing
this.

(MORE)

EDELFRID (CONT'D)

It's been decided that, in circumstances where the likelihood of death is this high, we should make our decisions based on the presumed time of death, rather than news of that death.

ALEX

What are you saying?

EDELFRID

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

Beat.

EDELFRID (CONT'D)

Alex?

ALEX

No. No. That's absurd.

EDELFRID

Alex-

ALEX

It's not about me, it's about the Law. I've been reading up - your interpretation is in opposition to both the letter and the spirit of the Schedule of Care. Look at the beginning of, uh, section thirteen. And the Fourth Appendix is relevant. And... wait, shit, I had it...

Edelfrid smiles.

EDELFRID

Alexander. You don't mean to tell me you're thinking of filing for a Writ of Manner-Complaint.

ALEX

A... what?

EDELFRID

Because if you were to file a Writ of Manner-dash-Complaint, in accordance with the Old Schedule section eight-stroke-eight...

She pauses for Alex to take notes.

ALEX
Eight... stroke... eight...

EDELFRID
Then I would be forced to maintain
my present duties until the Low
Council convenes in seven months.

Alex finishes his notes.

ALEX
That is... that's exactly what I'm
saying. Manner-Complaint?

Edelfrid nods.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Would that mean I couldn't file for
a Heavy Familial Protraction?

Edelfrid's eyebrows shoot up. She considers.

Huh.

EDELFRID
For Max?

ALEX
Yeah. I know it would be a stretch-

EDELFRID
Beyond a stretch. Unprecedented,
and the Old Law has a lot of
precedents.

ALEX
Is that good or bad?

EDELFRID
I don't know. I'll... I'll look
into it. In the meantime, if you
were going to submit a Writ - and
I'm not suggesting anything one way
or the other, you understand, but
if you were going to - you should
get started.

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.

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
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?

DRED

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

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

Everyone squints, stares, examines.

ZORION

What do you notice here?

JOHANNA

That's the dragon.

Waaaait 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 flipping 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! Hell 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.

ZORION

That's correct. As I calculate, our odds are not good, but as far as I can calculate, they are 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's in, I'm in.

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.

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)
...You wanted something?

DRED
You can't get any messages out, can
you? With your Sprite magic?

ZORION
No, why?

Zorion walks over, looks at Dred's screen.

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

ZORION (CONT'D)
Oh. Your brother.

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.

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 shakes his head.

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

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
Who gives a shit. 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

Shit.

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

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

I told you! Two megs! This guy is less than one!

DRED

It's fine, get ready to fight.

Johanna cheers, looks at Claude.

JOHANNA

Alright! Let's do it, big guy!

Claude's pumped and ready to go.

Dred looks back at Johanna.

DRED
No. He's big and loud, we need to
do this while avoiding any more
attention.

Claude's shoulder's slump.

DRED (CONT'D)
Can you-

JOHANNA
Singlehandedly kill a drake without
being at all noticable? Hell yeah.

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 stomps on a button on the floor; a spacesuit
materializes around her.

She charges out the window, slides right through like it's a
hologram.

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.

JOHANNA

If you don't stop that, you son of
a newt, I swear-

She charges towards it.

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.)

You wanna get out here and help?

DRED

Claude's coming out.

Claude jumps up, ready to go.

JOHANNA (O.S.)

It was a figure of speech, asshole!

Claude hangs his head.

DRED

I know you want to do this alone,
but-

JOHANNA (O.S.)

If you come out here, I swear to
me, I will kill them AND you!

DRED

Them?

SWITHIN

Three more. More coming.

Dred hesitates, looks at Claude.

CLAUDE

I will go.

Claude nods, moves to suit up, serious now.

DRED

Alright, Jo, I know-

JOHANNA (O.S.)

Oh SHIT. 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.)

Eat shit, Ethel! Eat a whole pile of it!

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 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 something AWESOME?

INT. DRAGONSLAYER - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

They're so far away, but you can 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. Could we 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. Might not 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, you know. Everybody who's still alive.

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. DRAGONSLAYER - 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.

CLAUDE

I could do this.

DRED

And survive?

CLAUDE

I came with you to fight a dragon. I have never assumed I would survive.

DRED

Nonstarter. Alternatives?

Swithin and Zorion look at each other. Back at Dred.

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

What's the downside?

SWITHIN

All those drakes swarming have made enough noise 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

Then we call it off. We run. I'm not losing anyone else.

SWITHIN

This will work.

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 changes to look like herself again.

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.

AGRIPPA (O.S.)

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.

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.

DRED

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, you know, 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
I do not need a shuttle.

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 rushes over them.

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.

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 GOLDEN FLARE at the south pole; the entire green defense mesh glows, as the gold 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.

Tears in his eyes.

Dred shakes her head. Agrippa's worried.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
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-

He cuts out.

AGRIPPA
Claude! Claude!

Dred clenches her fists.

SWITHIN
What do we do?

DRED
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 big.

He shifts, shakes. He's waking up, and he's pissed.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)

I'll let him know we're coming.

DRED

Is that a good-

A storm of missiles and lasers shower Jushur. He looks straight up, ROARS - the roar echoes through the ship a beat later.

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

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.

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
What if... we could all stay. We'll
circle to Claude, find somewhere to
hide. Jushur gets away, but-

SWITHIN
Etheldred.

They lock eyes.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)
I'll handle this.

Swithin kicks a button on the floor, suits up.

SWITHIN (CONT'D)
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 drill or a gun or
something!

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
You are incredibly frustrating to work with.

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

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. He grabs onto Dred, leaps out of the window as a massive claw looms closer.

EXT. THE DRAGONSLAYER - CONTINUOUS

Jushur casually swats the ship; 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

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 grabs the 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.

DRED (CONT'D)
Let's be heroes.

They hit the storm.

EXT. GRAV STORM - JUSHUR

Jushur flies through the storm, weaving among the currents. He's graceful, fluid. Natural.

Behind him:

ON DRED AND AGRIPPA

Dred HOLLERS AND CHEERS. She rides riptide gravity currents, narrowly dodges debris and adeptly slips 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-

ON 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.

CUT TO:

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 hell 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 Max here with me. Say hi,
Max!

Beat.

INT. BLACK MARK GUNSHIP - CONTINUOUS

The hooded figure stands next to Max, who's chained to the floor.

The hooded figure gestures. Max is ELECTROCUTED, 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
brother.

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 brother 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 my 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 SHIT!

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 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.

INT. BLACK MARK GUNSHIP - CONTINUOUS

The hooded figure has his face pressed to the window as the ship stabilizes.

HOODED FIGURE
Why are we not firing?! SHOOT IT!

They unload a volley at Jushur's side; Jushur doesn't notice.

DRED (O.S.)
Hey dipshit! He's got armor plating kilometers thick!

The hooded figure is losing it.

HOODED FIGURE
What do you want me to do!?

EDELFRID (O.S.)
Charging cannon. We're only going to get one shot at this.
(MORE)

EDELFRID (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Dred, get on the ship!

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Jushur ROARS at the Dwarven warship, moves it to swallow it whole.

Dred looks over at the Black Marks' gunship. It's on Jushur's left.

DRED
Aim for his eye!

EDELFRID (O.S.)
We don't have a shot at his eye!

DRED
Not you, you hold your fire! Tall,
dark, and evil! You want to live?
Hit the eye!

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.)
DO IT!

They unload another volley at Jushur's eye; it doesn't hurt him, but it's enough to catch his attention. He turns his good to face them, pointing his open eye crater at the Dwarves.

HOODED FIGURE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
IT DIDN'T WORK!

DRED
Edelfrid!

EDELFRID (O.S.)
We see it!

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)
YEEEEEEAAAAHHHHHH!!!

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
brother 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.

Max is helped inside by another aide.

Dred jumps off the table, tearing open some stitches the medic had been working on. She wraps Max 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, a trio of lizardmen, 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 Max inside; it's all marble gilded with precious metals. Fit for an empress.

DRED
Ho-lee... this is for me?

Max 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.

Max runs back to them.

MAX

Dred! We've got a pool!

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