

The Rise and Fall of the Church of Psi-Entolo-Jee

Resounding as if echoed from all places at once throughout the space station, Simon's voice booms in a serious tone, "For this tale of dread I wish to use an Electron Invocation <sqweeeeeeeeeeeee> <tap> <tap> ahem"

Simon's voice returns to normal, the feedback from the microphone he'd hacked through to the stations PA systems temporarily succumbing to the ravages of reality. "Close your eyes and imagine, if you will, the dark days of religious confusion. The universe rife with heresies and false prophecies. The chaos of the atheisms, the vagaries of the churches and the discontent of all the known sentient beings that was Tuesday three weeks ago."

Darkness seems to loom behind the robed figure of the Technomage as stands from his chair.

"From the depths of unknown space and the uncharted backwaters of last month came the TechnoElvan Wizard known to all now as Elrond. Elrond Halfbad." At mention of the name, the darkness spreads over the table, casting shadows on all.

"<cough> <cough>"

Simon kicks the smoke bomb down the corridor.

"It started out as a test. To begin with the man was not evil. Merely a scientist. Possibly mad (are they not all?)."

"A (and I prey this does not shock the more genteel of our company), a personality test."

A look of profound distaste squirms across Simons face.

"This being, this `techno-elf', took it upon himself to quantify a sentient being's personality into mathematical terms from which all their inherent problems could be predicted. Whether psychological, favourite number or colour, or even which charismatic leader or deity they should follow for their own `personal development'" "It was on the planet known as the 'Planet of the Angels' that he first appeared. Attracting many disaffected performance artists in the Sacred Forest, a well known tourist location."

"He used a specially designed insect he had previously bio-engineered for the purposes of quantifying a being's personality. Called a `Jee', this insect could use telepathy to examine a subjects mind for all their quirks and defining traits." "If it were not for the `Quack Alert' alarm going off (an ancient device installed throughout the universe by pioneering TechnoMages) I would not have been aware of his activities from the outset"

Jee History

But surely, interrupts Pia, Jees have been extinct ever since the Great Eradication Programme of the 30's, when the INTJ People's Antieugenics Front wiped out the insect species and destroyed all records of their DNA sequences.

Pia offers Simon a credit.

"Yes, well it was the fault of the INTJ to be selective breeding such a noxious species to begin with. I fault not the radical element that took upon themselves the genocide."

Simon struts back and forth in full lecture mode.

"However, they merely destroyed the species. In Terran Imperial terms they successfully completely eradicated the species Arthropoda Dayli subphylum 'G' and not the entire genus. Thus the 'Arthr Daylees' (as they were commonly known) still exist wheras the 'Ayli Jees' do not."

A simple, obviously insectoid DNA molecule materialises hologramatically above the table as Simon gestures towards it. One particular strand of amino acids moving to reform.

"Elrond merely took the original genus, which is phylogenetically similar, the 'ancestor' if you will, and genetically manipulated it to reform the 'G' formation, or a close approximation therof. Re-inventing the 'Jee' as it were. Manipulating the DNA in just one crucial area."

"Through much trial an error he eventually found the 'Jee' spot. He had too much time on his hands, obviously. His other combinations of failed insect species cause a famine in a nearby country until mentally enhanced insectivorous plants could be introduced (known as 'Kia') and caused to multply in great numbers. The event became a one-off tourist attraction. Much like the Terrans would watch the Salmon runs, tourists flocked to the Planet of Angels to see the Psi-Kia trysts."

The hologramatic strand disappears as Simon waves his staff. Also the coin proffered by Pia.

"I am most sorry, I seem to have drifted off track there somewhat. Let me gather my thoughts before continuing the story."

Arrival

"A small telltale lit upon my control panel, the holographic midget bard informing me of the precipitous occurance of a culture changing event : 'quack'"

Simon sits and stares intently off into space.

"I was at that time traversing hyperspace in my ship on other business. The eddies and swirls of causal energies drifting lazily in reds and blacks of visible light."

"Accessing various databases and probes set upon Los Planeta des Angeles, as the locals named it, back in the days of the Spanish colonisation effort, before their media boom." From his voluminous black robe a hand thrusts forth. The palm of which nestles a crystal sphere in which the image of a sleek black wedge shaped ship can be seen. It is unknowable whether the ship is moving or not, as there are no points of reference in the drifting red mists of hyperspace.

"I swiftly achieved the coordinates of the system and opened a gate back into normal space."

A large swirlingly blue cone appears in front of the small ship and seems to swallow it. Either that or the ship accelerated away at high speed in a direction that can't be seen. "Unfortunately the necessary checking and double checking required by the systems we had set in place meant that the Movement was well underway by the time an alarm was sent. Already several leading Tri-D Holo Stars

had professed to believing in the methods of Elrond for a happy life. Even the ruler of the planet had admitted her fondness for the path of Psi-Entolo-Jee."

"The psionic nature of the artificially mutated/evolved Jees enabled them to communicate with each other. It it through this network, of greater Jee controlling several lesser Jee, with Elrond at the top that he maintained absolute control."

"Jees...", muses Brro. "That genetic manipulation you illustrated didn't look too stable - hang on..." Brro pulls out an antique biro and some paper, and quickly scribbles a schematic of a Jee chromosome. "Heh. Jee-nome. Anyway, all it would take is for introns in these genes here, and here, to recombine, and you'd end up with a proteomic event leading to mass genetic instability. You'd get a whole host of similar species, all derived from the same source, but with vastly different morphologies. Most wouldn't be viable, but you might get, for example, a species with increased size, a greater need for food, and a far more vicious and destructive nature, but otherwise eerily similar.

"I'll wager that even before you landed, your ship was severely endangered by bad analogue Jees, like a spider trapped in a web."

Brro places a Republic credit on the table.

War Area Terra

"It was indeed, the delay proving deadly to countless multitudes on the Terran homeworld as you must realise." Simon incants and the perception of reality for the listeners is altered. As though being sucked into the story. The mechanics of the Electron Incantation and it's instant mass consensual hallucinations induced and controlled by the invoker, the borderline dream trance over any species being little understood by any, even the TechnoMages themselves. Simon's chrysalis of power amplifying his thoughts through his own unique paradigm, the alien device itself an unknown country to explore. No longer at the table, but standing, as if inside a fully realistic hologram, the beings at Brro's table look upon the black ship as it leaves hyperspace. Simon himself stands to one side, pointing or explaining as the need arises.

The majestic sphere of Planeta Angeles swells into view, the TechnoMage ship approaching it at speed. Half in shadow, the crescent of the dawn divides a third of the planet from the light of its yellow sun. Tiny points of light can be seen in small clusters on the night side indicating major settlements. As Simon's ship approaches close to orbit distance, the sphere growing to fill the sky, many small but brilliant flashes occur over the surface. Even on the day side the ship engine exhausts can be seen as the take off from the surface.

"At this stage, the entire planet was gearing up for war. Elrond himself stayed in the Sacred Forest, sending forth his 'minions' as it were to retake the Terran homeworld. Planeta Angeles was originally settled from Terra and they wished to spread the word of their great philosophical discovery back home."

The trangular single person ship of the Technomage enters the atmosphere. The fast flowing mists of the clouds whipping past its black surface. As it breaks free into clear sky over the suburbanised city that is the Sacred Forest a large rope smacks against the craft. It veers to the sides, its high speed course shunted by the impact. Another coil of rope impacts, this time it moves to encircle. Simon's ship slows considerably. More hit. Hit and begin to cling. They are not ropes but the large tentacles of a Badanalo Jee. Drifting under the cloud layer, one of the few Jee species kept alive by Elrond as a

defence against intrusion.

"The concussion of my ship and the abrupt halt as I was stuck in a a Badanolo Jee rendered me unconscious for a considerable time. Over the next few days I was not aware of the invasion force that converted the Terrans it could in space and routed those it could not convert."

"The Terrans immune to this Aly Jee retreated to the planet of Terra, where the faithful of the Halfbad proceeded to bomb them back into the stone age."

"When I regained consciousness I immediately began gathering information and forming a plan of action, before I even attempted to free my ship."

Trav Jonolta

The interior of the ship is dark, the lights and readouts set amongst panels of black metal. Dimly illuminated from the outside sun the cowed figure works feverishly at a terminal.

"My plan now became twofold. First I must halt the attacks on Terra, justified as they may be. Secondly I must put an end to this cult before it spread to other sentient races and throughout the universe."

"The key to the plan, as you shall see, were the sentient clams of Necron IV. But first I needed to free my ship."

Realisation strikes the TechnoMage as he straightens from his research. The afterimage of several biological scans of the Badanalo Jee fading on the screen. The cramped interior is deftly navigated in the near darkness, only thrice does the man's metal skullcap bump into the ceiling. With a clang and curse he proceeds to the midsection of the ship. A hatch cycles above and Simon slowly rises on a platform to the outside of his vessel.

Standing at an odd angle to the ground, tangentially to the ship's hull, he gazes up at the Badanalo Jee's large bulk dominating the cloud strewn sky. The high winds barely slow his casual walk amongst the rope-like tentacles that entrap his ship. He reaches out with one gloved hand and pulls out a particular string of tendon in a particular tentacle, removing it. The tentacles loosen and the ship falls free. It became much easier to let slip the ship after the Jee string was removed. The sonorous note of forlorn that issued forth at the plucking of the Jee's string accompanying the descent.

Calmly walking back to the hatchway and re-entering his vehicle, the TechnoMage leaves the planet, once more to enter hyperspace. Intent on a quick trip to the Necron system.

Meanwhile on Terra, the decadent natives of Angeles, led by their most warlike performance artist, one Trov Janolta were destroying the major cities. His faux-disco platform shoes booming on the bridge floor in the flagship.

"I'll wager," says Pia, offering another credit, "that the sentient clams weren't keen to be involved. I'll bet to had to help them out of their troublesome contract with the eccentric Emperor Nyi before they agreed to help."

"Indeed I did, young lady, indeed I did."

Simon walks in front of the semblance of himself. Leaning against the pseudo-reality of the pilot's

chair in this, dreamlike trance.

"It was to do with the two very abilities the clams possessed that I required most to defeat Elrond and the martial forces of Trav. Their very nature, and their digestive systems. In particular the byproducts of the same."

The coin disappears from the dreamscape that is the Electron Incantation as Simon accepts the wager.

"But I need a short time to gather my thoughts."

Clam Ciao Da

The interior of the ship as it hurtles through the mists of hyperspace fades to black. Suddenly there is a feeling of being elsewhere.

Meanwhile, on the planet Necron IV...

A vast hallway of industrial concrete and glass. The floor strewn with cheap cushions, upon which rest man-sized clams in uniforms. The Necronian symbol for the Water and Power corporation emblazoned on their shells. Humanoids sit at a table facing the crowd, all well dressed and exhuming an air of legality. Some would argue that it was more repugnant than the air of methane that the clams occasionally put forth by accident. For that was their speciality, converting food into methane. A powerful energy source that had kept the W&P corporation a leader in the markets.

This, however, was the one hundred and twelfth union meeting of the clams. The dispute over their pay and conditions celebrating it's second year of non-agreement. The clamour of the clam's clacking shells reverberated around the room. Deafening the humanoids and vibrating the windows.

It was the clam's propensity to talking all at once that had caused such a delay in negotiations. The interpreters of the Emperor Nyi, co-founder of the W&P corp, were unable to distinguish between the clams as they all clacked alike, and when several talked at the same time, the rhythms were so overlapped that nothing could be understood.

"I did not arrive to the planet until well after this particular meeting. I can only speculate that these events took place, but then the clams are known for their stubbornness and the previous recordings of earlier meeting have always ended the same way."

A well furnished room. Carpeted, well lit, a desk, chairs and wall paintings. Sitting in the impressive armchair behind the desk is Emperor Nyi of no fixed abode. His pustulant green form exuding musks of pungent flowers from his corpulent, but well dressed, form.

The door irises open to admit the Technomage, his black enshrouded body strides purposefully into the room. Pausing to recover from a brief stumble on a deceptively flat and unobstructed area of floor, he sits opposite His Imperial Lowness.

"I had already contacted the authorities on Necron and determined the situation for the large amount of clams I required. I foresaw a swift conclusion to these dealings through an immediate talk to the CEA of W&P, the Emperor himself and swiftly arranged the meeting."

Simon wanders into the room through a wall, standing behind the image of himself in the chair before

again speaking.

"The chief difficulty they were having with their workers was communication. I offered my services in exchange for a favour."

"What do you mean, you wish to borrow my workers!"

The Emperor, outraged, fumed in swelling waves.

"Your lowness, it is merely for a day, they will be returned afterward."

"You can't have them, I need them!"

"Are they working now?"

It looks sheepish in a very green bug-eyed monster kind of way.

"Soon we worked the details out and I provided a machine for his interpreting needs. A multi-tasking asynchronis mimetic audio decoder in the sawtooth waveform bass bandwidth. Once he had his Clacks Machine, he almost did not choke on his own bile when I insisted he help transport the clams as part of my payment. After that, and a swift chat with the head clam, one Ciao Da, we were off back to Angeles for a brief respite from their contractual obligations. When I say `swift chat' I am obviously summarise a long and tedious contract negotiation for the sake of brevity - needless to say Ciao Da's stubbornness was legendary."

The Church of Psi-entolo-Jee

Meanwhile in the Sacred Forest Bowl (the largest auditorium on the planet) the tall thin figure of a TechnoElf strides amongst his cloning equipment. Sparks coruscate with a buzz as they travel the Jacob's Ladder between his long pointed ears, dissipating into the air. His earlier theoretical studies into personality already had proven his predisposition to megalomania and total domination of the known universe; he whistled happily while engineering further rampant strains of Jee. Jee able to withstand any environment and deliver accurate personality tests, or even mass print the ongoing adventures of the current leader of the Psi-entolo-Jee movement, Trav Jonolta.

For the sun-dwelling indigenous inhabitants of Nova Hollande (now sadly enslaved by the Blue Sky Mining Corporation), there was the Apollo Jee. The high gravity programming syndicate floating above the Selenium Vale, the Appo Jee.

Elrond's evil knew no bounds.

On Terra, new terror took form. Trav Jonolta set up an internment camp. A large domed enclosure miles across. He organised raiding parties of platform shoed converts to penetrate the hideouts of the non-believers. Capturing all they could to bring to the camp for brainwashing and personality tests. The dread call of "Are you happy with your life?" echoing a visceral dread amongst the survivors. Special breeds of cave dwelling Jee that could see in the dark, the Geo Low Jee, were bred to help root them out.

Things were looking grim on Terra, but for the rise of a local hero; one Dick Harry.

"I will explain Dick Harry's escape from the camp known as the Church of Psi-entolo-Jee momentarily. As his success is tied to my success. And I'm yet to arrive on the scene..."

The pale blue sky above the city of Sacred Forest twinkles with star-like points of bright light. Elrond pauses a moment in his work to peer out a window at the sight. The points of light open out into

hyperspace exits. The blue swirling cones covering the sky as the massed transport fleet of Necron W&P disgorge into real space, entering the atmosphere. At the head of the fleet, the black wedge shaped ship of Simon the Technomage leads with clam Ciao Da.

"Mindblowing stuff", comments Ariel who is fascinated by the story that swirls around her.

"I've had dealings with Trav Jonolta. He's not a bad dancer (not a *good* one, mind you, but not a bad one either). Pretty wiley too. I'll wager that he almost foiled Dick's escape with the help of the Bee Jees - a few minutes of that high pitched wailing would render almost anyone helpless!"

Stayin' Alive

"Indeed so, Officer Rommer, and I must thank you for the reminder.", Simon says. With one hand on his hip he shoots forth his other arm above his head, to tap the skies of Angeles with his staff. Ripples spread and the universe dissolves into a long white corridor. It could be an industrial plant on any planet, replete with bulbous- skirted, plunger-equipped Janitor droids bent on exterminating pests. It is in fact deep inside the Church on Terra as subtitles fade into view, almost tripping Simon.

In a cold white room strewn with posters of upcoming Halfbad book releases sits Dick Harry. He sits forlornly in front of a desk dominated by the squat, terrible form of a Jee. Behind the desk, his bad dreadlock and padded shoulders almost filling the small room, Trav himself sits. He enjoys taking a personal hand in conversions. Two guards stand close behind Dick, ready for any funny business.

The Jee probes Dick - see Dick get probed, the aura of light suffusing the surrounding air. His face is emotionless, and then he closes his eyes.

The Jee squeals and explodes. Minute pieces of chitin ricochet off Dick and Trav before globules of green ichor splatter the entire room. For Dick has no personality. Blinded the guards drop their guns and clutch at their faces. Trav bellows in rage, bursting to his feet, the top half of his body a mass of dripping goo. Dick's survival instincts cut in and he immediately dashes through the door, running down the corridor. Hearing guards ahead, he adopts an air of nonchalance.

[do dup doop, dah doop doop doop, dah dooo....]

As they round the corner they can tell by the way he walks, he's not their man: no time to talk. As Trav yells out loud the guards to warn, he gets kicked down, by guard Sean. They now all fight, in disarray. And while he hopes to get away. We see him gain the upper hand - he breaks away and then he ran.

Whether Dick would rather be running for cover,

Trying to survive, stayin' alive.

Till his stride breakin, and guards overtakin'

Soon to arrive, taken alive.

Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive, stayin' alive.

Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive.

[end of filk]

The screams of the Bee Jees that Trav had setup as a defensive perimeter stunned Dick and he went down.

Clam Invasion

"The entire strike force of clams would have been destroyed if it were not for the local big cat breeding program"

Simon steps in front of the image of the corridor, breaking the illusion of reality.

"Approximately ten years ago the Angelans first attempted to introduce big cats into the local ecology. Using cloning technology and old gene stocks from Terra they grew 200 of the beasts and released them into a reservation set aside for them." "After a 5 year wait, not one of them bore children. So extreme methods were undertaken. Aphrodisiac chemicals were introduced to their food supplies. They started mating like crazy. But a year later - still no offspring". "It was then that they hit upon their great mistake - every clone had an X and a Y chromosome - they were all males. What they had were now 200 homosexual animals." "The ridicule drastically affected their funding and they were only able to grow and introduce 10 females into the prides. Unfortunately none of the males were interested in them. They introduced even more chemicals and the animals went wild, breaking out of the reservation and causing panic at the nearby winter Olympic stadium. A lake - an entire lake fitted with refrigeration units on floatation devices. Unfortunately for the Angelans, winter temperatures never reached the freezing point of water." "After this fiasco, all funding was cut. They were unable to round up the animals so they merely extended the reservation. There was some good news however, a couple of the males were spotted mating with females. To keep track of these males, one of the researchers painted a metallic stripe down their backs, so that if the project was ever revived, they could spot them from the air using radar."

The Church dissolves to once more show the skies above Angeles. The W&P fleet manoeuvring to land. Several airborne Jee swarm the ships, seemingly guided with great precision. Their tactics almost overwhelming the transport ships until the black wedge of Simon's ship opens fire on the leader, blowing the Strato Jee to small pieces.

The damage has been done though, the landing gear of the transport ships too damaged to land. In a last ditch effort to fulfil their contractual obligations, they disgorge their clam cargo over coordinates designated by the TechnoMage. Having chosen a suitable large flat landing spot for the clams, Simon watches from his ship as they begin their slow descent. The parachutes opening in groups over the iced lake. He lands the ship and wanders towards the lake to wait for their slow arrival.

"Unbeknownst to me at the time, not only did Elrond have minions already at the site, but the refrigeration units included heaters to return the lake back into a swimmable area. The technicians converted by the TechnoElf had installed modifications and were intent on not only melting the lake, but heating it to the boiling point."

The human sized clam continue to descend gently towards the ice as Simon walks towards the control room at the far end, wondering at all the lights. The control room is not only well lit, but so is the ice. Floodlights illuminating the white plain and the red hot thermal coils glowing. Steam rises from the ice and with a sense of dread Simon realises what is going to happen and he will not be able to stop it in time.

As the white clouds of hot steam billow into the air, the parachutes are soaked. Not designed for hot water, they collapse - dropping every clam through the now thin layer of ice and into the warming water below. The panicking black clothed form of the Technomage sprints toward the control room barely acknowledging one of the local teachers as she wanders around checking out the effects the steam may have on the big cats. Gwen was one of the researchers in the project before it went

defunct, and now could only make money teaching geometry at the local primary school.

The floodlights flicker. There is a loud cracking noise. All the lights die, the thermal coils fade to black. A column of smoke rises from one side of the lake as Gwen rushes to investigate. Simon continues on to the control room, only to discover that it has now been deserted – the electronic machinery fused as it overloaded. The sudden increase in electricity amongst the coils on their little boats had blown all the fuses and partially melted the generator.

"I only found out later, when talking to Gwen, what had happened and what the smoke was between the thermal coils. The geometry teacher explained to me that the shorted resistance between the two punts was a straight lion."

60 Microts

As the Bee Jees hauled him off towards their hive, deep under the Church, Dick Harry saw his life flash before his eyes.

"Now you may wonder how it comes to be that Dick Harry has no personality. It was an unfortunate birthing mutation which naturally led him into a career in investigative journalism. He didn't become well known until he joined the show known as 60 Microts. Together with Shannon Aviarre and the Moe clones, they hosted a current affairs show almost as famous as InterStellar News (ISN)."

"Has anyone here heard of them? Or their most famous piece of `journalism'?"

Killer Queen

"The reason I mention Dick's previous employment is soon to become obvious."

The strobing lights of the alarm systems Dick's escape activated would be more intimidating if they weren't in such varied colours. Unfortunately lights strafing over every surface added a very disco feel to the entire trip. The Bee Jees fairly bopping along as they escort Dick Harry in to their underground hive. Down some ramps and out into what was a large underground parking lot.

A look of surprise crosses his features as they walk past a pile of weapons. It's the weapon cache his team had uncovered in the Borneo guerrilla war before the invasion. Last he remembered one of the clones had taken it when the guerrilla group came under artillery fire by the local government (apparently they tracked down some sort of transmissions coming from the hideout).

The alarms had set off the sprinkler system as well, although they now appeared to be shut off. For in the garage in water from the sprinklers: They'd left a man's decapitated body, lying on the floor next to his own severed head. A head, which on prime time had much fame.

"I know his name.", thought Dick, "It's the second clone of Moe, clone `B' – What are they doing down here? What is HE doing here?" He now had cause to worry. What about the rest of his team? The other clone? His Chinese anchorman Shannon Aviarre?

And then they entered the royal court.

Against one wall there was a large metal birdcage type structure with people inside. In the centre of

the room rested a guillotine, its blade bloody and poised. Seated on her throne of wax the Queen of the Bee Jees surveys the new arrival. She signals her guards to net one of her captives and bring them forth. Dick waited for an opportunity to flee.

[doop doop doop doop]
She keeps Moe "A" and Shannon
In her metal bascinet
"Behead them all" she says,
"Just like Marie Antoinette"
"A built-in remedy"
"For a lack of personality"
"At anytime an invitation"
"You can't decline"

Aviarre with no regrets
Slipped from the guards nets
Yelling in loud voice:

[CHORUS]
"She's a Killer, Queen!"
"Quick grab the gelatine"
"Dynamite or a laser beam"
"Guaranteed to kill her kind"
"Save mankind!"

"Recommend you avoid her face: "
"Insatiable an appetite "
"Wanna try? "

To avoid the guillotine
She skirted round with some success
Pincer in the man's spleen
She mauled Shannon in the chest
Ate the man from China
Gulped him down deep inside her
Then Dick's guard accidentally
Scanned Dick Harry's mind.

It fumed and suddenly exploded
The clone from the cage goaded
Moe "A" then gave advice:

[CHORUS]
"She's a Killer, Queen!"
"Quick grab the gelatine"
"Dynamite or a laser beam"
"Guaranteed to kill her kind"
"Save mankind!"

[end of filk]

With the distraction of one of the Bee Jee guards exploding and the Queen digesting one of his colleagues, Dick finally managed to free himself. He ran back to the cache, little realising that none of the weapons left were functional or had ammunition. The Bee Jees had captured his team when they were interviewing Trav Jonolta. The subsequent search of their vehicles and `acquiring' of the weapons was an added bonus. Dick was doomed.

A summary

Simon turns to the group.

"Now things were going downright against my plan. As I had mentioned previously, all Jee are psionically networked. I was sure that if I could get much of the Jee on the Angeles planet to scan the clams, the feedback would not only overload them, but transfer to other Jee as well. Unfortunately, Dick Harry's interrogation on the planet Terra had pre-emptively alerted the Jee to this weakness. The confusion of his capture in the Queen's hive was the only other time that he was accidentally scanned."

"To sum up, I was near a lake on Angeles. A lake full of human-sized clams. And Dick Harry was about to have his head removed. A rather sticky situation."

"How, you may ask, was I to get out of that particular scrape?"

"I'll wager," says Pia, with an air of having heard something about this part before, "that your escape involved a chef, a chowder and a silk chemise."

Placid Lake

"Aha!", Simon yells as he lunges towards Pia, grabbing from behind her back a piece of smartpaper, the words still readable upon it. "Just as I suspected, you've been reading from `The Rise and Fall of the Church of Psi-Entolo-Jee' cliff notes!" "Highly unfair, and they still owe me for it too, took me the entire weekend to write..."

The shore of an alien lake, late afternoon sun undulating across the rippled surface. Steam and smoke clearing into the blue-grey sky, little tendrils disengaging from the now inoperative thermal coils. The waters still themselves in expectation.

From the placid lake a behemoth bursts forth. Spray flies from the shell as it leaves the water, an ovoid upright in the air. And then it crashes back to the surface, the clam's shell opening and closing gently as it makes its way to shore it spurts of water. Around the shoreline other clams break free of the watery deeps, journeying to rest on the sands.

Simon breathes a sigh of relief as wanders back towards his ship, already planning on organising some transport. A sense of suspicious relief as a seemingly lucky fleet of trucks arrive quickly turns to panic as he spots the markings of the Hell's Kitchen crack cookery division – caterers to megalomaniacs and petty dictators the universe over. Not having the necessary firepower to rescue the clam army, he attaches a probe to the lead vehicles to track their destination before running back to his ship.

Heaven's Devils piled out of the vehicles. The truckie gang hauling clams in their studded leather smocks and aprons.

Simon arrived back just in time to see the clam leader, Ciao Da, being pulled out of his ship by a surprise chef, adept at infiltration and stews.

This was the final straw, holding forth a hand, Simon summons elemental fire. He draws his arm back to hurl the ball of incandescence, just in time to have his nadgers relocated with a steel capped boot. Squeeling in octaves not meant for mortal man, consciousness is lost. Possibly a good thing, as the renegade chef eyes his leather garments.

"Ahem, no comment."

Sometime later, the naked Technomage awakes, handcuffed to his ship.

He reached for his staff, bitterly regretting having not forked out the extra \$49.95 for the sonic screwdriver option. But with judicious application of the rudimentary laws of kinetic energy distribution over small surface areas and metallurgical malleability, he freed himself. Straightening out his staff after beating the bejesus out of the handcuffs proved somewhat more difficult, however.

The only clothing remaining within his ship, however, was left by a previous, ah, guest... Slipping into the unfortunately sheer garment, did at least hid the scars and mechanical protuberances around his spine that gave evidence of the TechnoMage chrysalis. The cybernetic machine the source of the order's power.

Luckily his ship did not require a key to start. Engaging stealth mode and deciding not to rev the engine at crossroads, he manages to follow the combat caterers back to Elrond's lair.

Larder at supper time

Whilst Simon stealthily infiltrated the auditorium, clad in nothing but the silk garment left behind by a dear friend. Or perhaps inexpensive would be a better word, Dick Harry was about to meet his fate:

Trav Jonolta enters the hive, resplendant in his battle-flares, ordering the Bee Jees to cease and desist in their decapitations – Saving Dick's neck in the nick of time. Although the Bee Jees were matriarchal, for the purposes of Elrond, Trav had been given the honorary title of "King Jee Over All", and awarded ceremonial denims.

Apparently Elrond himself wished to interrogate (and perhaps torture to death) a man with no personality in order to engineer a better Jee, for he now regarded himself as quite the Jee wiz. He had been spending the last few days perfecting a planet to planet teleportation system and intended to test it on Dick. This was his tenth and final version of what he dubbed "The Doge Machine".

"Elrond arrogantly thought himself smarter than I, anticipating my strategies. With the help of his psionic network he was kept uptodate on my almost successful invasion attempt. Hiring mercenary cooks was to him a stroke of genius. With the imminent total conversion of Terra, and the acquisition of the rare delicacy of chowder from a sentient species of clam – what better time to celebrate?"

"He invited the heads of his organisation, including Trav and the Queen of the Bee Jees who were to teleport after Dick. He even developed a special catering breed to look after the guests in his house, the austere Romanor Jees. His one major fatal mistake was to store the clams in the larder. Whilst

having no limbs or manipulatory organs with which to escape, he deemed them harmless. But they were not for my purposes.”

Shimmy Chemise

The Sacred Forest Bowl is a large auditorium in the neo-python style. The main floor with it's rows of cushioned chairs and aisles specifically wide enough for Albatross hawkers had been totally re-arranged. The stage area was now festooned with scientific devices of Frankensteinian proportions. The seating area partitioned off and converted into the Psi-Entolo-Jee Company's (or Psi Co. for short) meeting room and bingo hall. The large oak table dominated the centre as the world leaders of this cult started to gather in preparation for the TechnoElf's celebration. Next to the Doge machine in one corner, was the rack and table of torture instruments with which Elrond intended to start the entertainment.

Simon's first obstacle upon arrival to the building were the guards at the door. He crept to within sight of them near the service entrance. Spotting the trucks of the Hell's Kitchen empty and parked nearby, he assumed the guards had already let them through with their goods. Buckling up his courage, he removed his chemise and sauntered forth.

The looks of disgust from the guards at his pale, naked, and cybered body did not go unnoticed. Their attitude helped him to attain the arrogance he needed to pull off his performance. Staff in one hand and silk chemise in the other, he strutted between them. The Heaven's Devils were renowned for the eccentricity of their members and the guards waved Simon through, assuming him to merely be a naked chef.

His bare feet allowed silent movement as he prowled the corridors in search of the chef with his clothing. He managed to surprise him in the corridor from behind, pulling the chemise over his the chef's head before hauling him into a closet and bludgeoning him into unconsciousness. He didn't kick the man too many times after that, either. He redressed himself and took also the leather hat of the chef, wondering at how they made it appear puffy at the top.

“With the hat, I was now virtually indistinguishable from the Heaven's Devils myself, except for my staff that is. I came across the larder near the kitchen - both were situated underneath the meeting area above. I met with the clams there, and with the aid of a hollow coconut found in the stores, began frantically to communicate with them. I began force feeding them until I was rudely interrupted”.

A group of leather clad mercenary cooks burst through the larder door intent on cooking clam. Quickly Simon interrupts their progress.

“Out'ta da way meathead, we's here for the clams. It's cookin' time it is”

“I believe the great Elrond himself requires a small aperitif to allay his hunger to begin with, he wished a single clam to be tested to be made sure that its levels of toxicity were benign before all his guests were fed the entire lot.”

“What?”

“I said, he wished one to be tested first before the rest were cooked.”

“What?”

“We cooks one now, roight? Rest we cooks later. Big yum yums.”

“Oh yer, roight.”

Ciao Da fell forward and clacked with nobility. This volunteer, this unselfish shellfish would allow Simon enough time to implement his plan. Ciao Da was carried out to the silence of the clams. After their respectful pause as its martyrdom, they again resumed their eating under Simon's direction.

Doge X Machine

Simon gestures with his staff at the ceiling of the larder, his mass analysis scanners revealing the room above and its occupants. From his previous scans his placement appeared ideal. In the end it is all about location and opportunity.

The formation of the elements of puzzles, each representing aspects of time and space, revolve in the TechnoMage's head – evoking his Chrysalis and empowering the changes to the nature of reality. Small semi-transparent yellow spheres of force come into being, circling his head as they rise towards the ceiling. Touching the thick cement overhead, they begin eating their way around with small “wucka wucka” noises.

The fumes of clam byproducts begin filling the large room with a choking speed. One hand covering his mouth and nose, a small forcefield separating out the molecules, Simon continues to slowly dig his tunnel upwards.

In the room above, The Queen of the Bee Jees shimmers into existence in the Doge machine in a flurry of sparkling motes. Striding to meet Elrond, she takes her place at his right hand. Trav follows soon after, the sparks of the teleportation settling to the floor as he moonwalks to his place on Elrond's left. The main double doors at the end of the auditorium open to admit two female Heaven's Devils carrying a silver tray on which rests a bowl of noble chowder for Elrond's sampling.

They march heavily towards the table only to suddenly disappear halfway there. A shattering sound and a dull heavy thud come from below as the two fat ladies and the almost finished cement filled tunnel hit the floor of the larder fifteen feet below. A quiet, muffled, “damn damn damn damn damn” is heard – as of a prematurely executed plan annoying someone who has just had a great weight dropped on their toes.

The sudden compression and release suffuses the gas from the larder into the room above, billowing out to fill the auditorium. Elrond stands abruptly in disgust at the foul smell, a look of panic as he stares at the Doge machine.

Dick Harry appears.

In the city of Sacred Forest, on the planet of Angels, all is quiet. A calm before a storm. A clam induced firestorm. From the outside the Bowl appeared to shudder before cracks appear in its cement walls. The building shudders again and collapses. A huge mushroom shaped fireball rises into the air to the sound of a thousand clams clacking – and then suddenly silent. The horror of the Queen's annihilation echoed throughout the Jee, each insectile part of the hive mind shutting off – the bodies falling to the ground lifeless.

Sometime later, pulling himself from the rubble, a blackened figure emerges.

“I had a probe prepared, to be placed in the tunnel and cause a small explosion once the gas filled the room above and I was safely at great distance. But things do not always go to plan. I did not foresee the Doge machine, nor the two fat ladies. On a positive note, however, all the remaining clams

survived, their shells providing sufficient protection. The Emperor Nyi seemed inappropriately pleased at the loss of clam Ciao Da when his workers were returned."

"The body of Dick Harry was never found, however I did find some cooked remains. Not having eaten it days, I had to at least taste it. It wasn't HalfBad."

The universe wavers and dissolves to the sound of "doodle do da do, doodle do da do", and Simon is once again seated at a table in the bar of a spaceport. Around him sit his fellow adventurers, as before, except the middle of the table which seems to have a burnt flattened leather chef's hat lying on it.

"Metastable States! I'm definitely paying attention! I hope you didn't mistake my quietness for innattentativitvit-"

Bobo's head jerks spasmodically, and a low whirring sound emanates from his cranium, concluding in a muffled "krchunk-kk". He sits up a little straighter.

"-ity. But sometimes, you know, the effort of producing something strains the creativity routines."

Pia, her eyes red, sniffs a little. "That poor clam! But what a wonderful story, Mr Technomage."

"Truly, Simon, a narrow escape for the universe at large."

Bobo shakes his head.

"Thank goodness you were on hand."

"Ever since his noble sacrifice last week", Simon burps, "I keep getting a ache in my heart for Ciao Da, recurring again, and again.." A tear starts to form in his eye, as of a deep internal pain. "Compared to myself, its nobility is not easily absorbed and I am only now aware of the clam's full potential."

A brief spasm of guilt, and then he turns to Zara. "I understand, Ms. Jenkins, that you were on Terra during the invasion. I would be much interested to find out why." "I had heard that you saved all the lawyers on Terra with naught but a particle accelerator and a small can cheese-whiz. I would much like to know the story of how you did this, and more importantly, why?"

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