

# SURF SQUADRON

By J. E. Tremulant

Down in the Big Data, subterranean corporate wonderland, operated an accelerated capitalist economy as fragile as a glass machine and twice as needy. In fact, it was referred to as the Need Machine. If the Need Machine was going strong, the Big Data operated like normal. Problem was that the NM sometimes went wrong, got slow, things played out wrong. Governments of old would enact polices and other bureaucratic band aids to keep the economy strong, but the Big Data is not the size of a country. A small country, but not the URNA, even if such a thing hadn't existed in quite a while. Not to mention Industrial Intelligence Informational Technologies Incorporated (or IITI) was not a regular society or country by any means. So, when times got lean, and the Need Machine slowed, sometimes you had to give it a push.

The Department of Economy & Supply (or DES) was established to keep this happy machine of commerce going forever. A subsector of the DES was Commerce Control, and within this subsector were the groups known as the Behavior Specialists. The Behavior Specialists, or BS, BSers, or "Bullshitters", was a term to describe the many crews of contract specialists who were tasked with giving the Need Machine a jumpstart when it needed it. The crews worked like freelancers, wheeling, dealing, making contracts, and drawing up coordinated plans with clients in need of some sort of aid or issue to be taken care off, all usually in the name of profit and commerce, which would benefit the Big Data in the end. It always did.

Any eight-bit hustler or smooth talker can form his own BS crew and begin taking contracts, provided they had some good social credit and funds to work off of for the first few gigs, not to mention the bureaucratic bunk (licenses, legal legwork, protection, etc) to get into the game. But

it took a good mix of a lot of things, moxie, for one, to really keep on the top. There were many BS crews, operating throughout the Big Data, doing clients, undoing clients, etc, but few of them had actually done the game well enough, played the slots, been around the block to really stand out, be noticed by all, even the executives and top brass of the Big Data.

Two did, however. A few would be known regionally, even be favorites by the pro-andy forces (like the ROR), or the post-human entertainment elite (Mankind First) or even the mutants, but most weren't known across the board. Except two.

The first was the Surf Squadron.

Above and across the jumbled, parasite architecture mess that was Centerzone drifted a luxurious marble black hopper. The hopper is appropriately big. It is luxurious because it's carrying members of the Squadron to their place of work. The hopper is lined with numerous defensive devices and thick walls, having been worked over by their tech for maximum security and defense. Inside the hopper are three people. Two of them are named Sun and Sett. Sunn and Sett were a pair of what looked to be androgynous fashionista noir detectives, dressed like some 21st century cyberpunk interpretation of ancient Egyptian—that is, the same dark flowing bobs of hair like Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra, white glossy suits, the same sharp, cutting eyes, etc, etc. Only their voices gave clues—Sunn's voice is whiny, neo-valley girl, somewhat shrill, yet it's intentional, hiding a deviousness that works for her; Sett, who rarely spoke, vocalized in a cold, husky voice, somewhat masculine. The pair were arguing, going over a proper plan of action for an upcoming job.

"I mean, why not go organic with it all, this guy's like got all the workings of a classic break down!" had been Sunn's defense of her more traditional plan.

"Because they'll expect that," had been Sett's response.

"The average level employee doesn't have futures machines on standby," Sunn shot back.

"No, but Records would," Sett replied. Sunn sighed.

“I just don’t think that having the guy go off in his office would be very cost effective on records,” Sunn continued. “They might not deal if we dangle this piece of info in front of the department head.”

“Transports are public,” Sett pointed out. “There’s no responsibility or cohesion there. They’ll just avoid that transport for a while.”

“Not if we lean on the ad runners there—”

The pair argued until the third person spoke. The third person was a man, dressed in a black trench coat, neo-cyberpunk, ironic 80s/90s, cool kid wizard, big cheesy sunglasses, shock of spiky golden hair, a nice “fuck it!” attitude, with a name that was a household name: Sagittarius Go. Go sits, having just woken up ten minutes before, and the Sparker, a cheesy energy drink that’s sponsoring him, kicks in, making him suddenly become alive, like an animatronic becoming animate.

“Hold it!” he shouts, jerking up, almost falling out of the chair. The pair turn, stopping in their tracks. Go has his hands on the sides of his head, grimacing as if in pain, and then he rambles, excitedly, smiling, pushing away the bad vibes from the pair’s argument.

“Both of you are thinking separately, disassociation! The pair of you are of one whole! Thus, your ideas are the same. We’ll soften the joe up on the commute, run him ragged on the transports, push his buttons, really mix his head up, I’ll get Dan and the Doc on him, maybe Em on him too, to really put him through the ringer y’know! We got an empty, so let’s wedge it open and splay him out, and we’ll have him come apart in the office, it’s gotta be in the office, those paper pushers are really skittish, best possible effect on them, but don’t worry about sweet talking the management, I’ll be on that, I just need you both to keep that sweet, sweet gold coming in so we can bust him down fast, y’know? Maybe we can play the field, increase our chances, I’ll need you both on the workplace, see the high and low risk ones, y’know, and we’ll do the deed, get paid and then we can start on prepping for the big season, y’know, really gotta get started on it, the Horn’s just waiting for us, so let’s do this, no need to keep arguing, just kiss and make up, so we can all go home happy, ok?”

The pair stared at Go with an equal amount of amusement and confusion. Sett was the first to speak, while Sunn had tracked his entire rambling speech on her mic.

“You’re gonna shit your pants if you don’t be careful with those sparkers,” Sett had said, almost laughing. Go smiled wide.

“Oh, don’t worry about me Sett, baby, I’m just riding the rush, got five minutes before it levels out, and I’ve got rid of my digestive track for precisely that reason,” Go rambled, smiling, shuffling, getting up to get something, dropping a few hidden empty Sparker cans as he did. His sunglasses had dropped a bit to expose two blue eyes, the whites of which were mostly bloodshot. Go had retrieved some sort of bottle, a nasal device of some kind and was now cramming into his nostril, snorting whatever it was. “This is gonna be another great season, I can feel it!”

“Think the Horn’ll pull some fast ones this time?” was Sunn’s question as she sat back on the black leather seats.

“Have you slept at all within the last week?” was Sett’s question, still mostly amused.

“Yes, probably, definitely—not in three days but I did take a few power naps, so I’ll be fine,” was Go’s response, to both Sunn and Sett accordingly, his voice was slowing down a tad, whatever was in the nasal can was leveling out the Sparker.

The Squadron’s offices were in a high-end place in Centerville, the dead center of Centerzone. Crème de la crème. Had to be. The Squadron had a 99% EmpRate for the group. You needed a 95% in order to even reside in Centerville. The offices were high end, prime real estate on the ‘surface’, right under the TV skies, not that anyone there glanced outside, a series of glossy buildings in front of which the hopper had touched down to let the three out. The trio trotted inside, past several custom automated droids, the closest to real children Spaceman Dan and Jo would ever possibly have, and into the offices proper.

The office was already somewhat bustling with activity. Drones, mostly temps and serfers, skittered this way and that on their tasks, barely parting when the trio strutted in through the halls, projecting the

image of an ironic surfer's paradise—beaches, island paradise, high waves and such. A projected high tide made the surfer closest to it jump each time it came crashing down on him. New guy, most likely. Into the main hall the trio went and there they met the rest of the squadron: Spaceman Dan was the tech boy, name so because of the silver replica NASA spacesuit he wore, modified to include the many tools and devices he used daily. As usual, he was tinkering with something, his timid, shaky voice explaining a gadget he had been working on to an attentive surfer. Not far away Jo Foxcatcher, security girl, hard girl, an amazon in armored gear and a buzz cut sat in her chair, reclined, alternating between watching the feeds, her security feeds, and Spaceman Dan, doing the latter with a loving gaze. Sunn giggled at the sight of her, the big powerful amazon making lover's eyes at this boy, to which Jo quickly turned her gaze, now cold and suspect, though not genuinely so, on her.

“Aw, your little melting heart!” Sunn teased her, almost climbing over the cubicle wall of Jo's desk. Jo gave a sardonic smile. “I still wanna publish those pics of you two to the feeds. I bet they'll get real popular!”

“Do that and I'll wring your neck,” she replied. “Good morning to both of you, by the way.”

Sett gave Jo a casual smile and a wave as he passed, with Sunn giggling and bounding away to join him. Go strutted through, pouring energy, chatting with the servers, lively excitable, almost shouting at the top of his lungs, making Jo and Dan stare at him with some concern.

“A good morning's tranquility my lovely crew! Today's gonna be a good day! New contract! Social call, but it's a doozy, already on the queue, but what else is new!”

Go cackled at his lack of wit as he passed by. Jo frowned.

“Remind me to ask the doc to drug you,” she commented. “You look like haven't showered or slept in days.”

“Haven't!” Go exclaimed, strutting up to Jo with his trademark smile. “Had the doc fix my works so those Sparkers would stop fucking me up, can't have any sedatives until the day after tomorrow. Believe me I'm a fucking tired as shit, but you gotta roll with it—”

He turned to give Spaceman Dan a big slap on the back, making the timid tech boy wobble, at the same time slapping a box in his hand.

“—hey Dan, have a gift! Got a new contract, so I need some gear on the stuff specified. You’ll be working with the doc today, ok? Stay strong my little spaceman!”

Go strutted into the head office before Dan could even reply, with the tech giving him a worried look, a look that quickly vanished when he recognized the item he had been given. Jo assumed it was something good as Dan quickly ambled to his work desk, and she resumed standing guard.

Doc Stretcher, “The Pharmacist”, was a plastic mix of Beverly Hills surgeon and mortician, a gaunt man that looked out of place in all black against bright tropical colors of the office.

“Ah, the gruesome twosome,” Stretcher rasped, offering a little sarcastic bow. “Good morning!”

“Doctor,” Sunn and Sett greeted in unison, offering their own little sarcastic bow. “Still practicing licensed medicine?”

“For now!” was the doctor’s cheery response.

Go ambled in now, rambling still, making notes to himself. Go’s main office was a set of three smaller offices encircling a small lounge decorated in various distractions and amusements of Go’s. The office on the right, a sizable executive suite, was Sunn and Sett’s office, while the other on the far left, actually something of a closet or storage place, belonged to “Instant” Emily, the Squadron’s breaker. The door was a custom anti-theft one, covered in locks, heavier than hell, with a single bulb on the outside, which glowed red like hot iron when Emily was working, or green when she was available, which was usually rare. Right now, it was neither, instead dim and dead. Go came in, rambling, leading the other three to his own office, a lavish leather box containing a big wooden desk in front of a big window view of the Big Data, a single metal box machine labeled as an “Autobox” and a shelf of books with a few chairs. The four seated themselves accordingly, with Go rambling on, slower, more coherently, but still quickly, willing various

projections and plans into and out of existence in his hand. He went on until he went to address “Instant” Emily and paused.

“Em not come in today?”

Somewhere in the far ends of Centerzone was a stark plastic panel lined hovel filled with three things—a sizable graveyard consisting of piles and piles of burned out or disassembled gear and computer parts stacked up against the walls, filling what little storage place there was, a modest workbench in a corner with a small shelf above lined with books and a series of small jailbroken replicators, and a single bed jutting out from the wall, piled high with clothes and blankets. The dark room was suddenly illuminated by the projected image of Sunn, who appeared via the room’s broadcast systems, her favorite way to get a hold of Emily.

“Oh, Emily, darling! Time to get up!” Sunn sang, running a few scripts to have her voice carried through all of the speakers in the room. “We’ve got a job to do sweetums, and you are required in meatspace girl!”

“Fuck off...” a voice moaned from somewhere and Sunn pursed her lips in a mocking show of offense, tut-tutting loudly over the speakers.

“Come on girl, we’ve got work to do. Get up before I send your address to Flying Dropkick Adam along with a box of chocolates!”

A groan emerged, followed by grumbling, growing louder, coming from the pile of clothes on the bed. The top of the pile moved to reveal a head, a woman’s head, a girl with a jagged, tar-colored pixie cut, a sleep racked face, squinting at the bright glow of Sunn’s projection. The girl glared at Sunn with a sigh.

“You bitch...”

Sunn giggled as “Instant” Emily reluctantly climbed out of bed, revealing a lanky, naked, pale girl covered in ports. Emily stumbled out, muttering some commands to the room, retrieving a fresh suit from a dispenser in the walls, addressing Sunn as she did, her bright, sapphire eyes visible now, freed of the wall of sleep.

“You sure you can’t, y’know, Autobox whatever’s going on today? I made it for you fuckers for a reason...”

“And we’ve used it a lot actually. Five times in the last week. Problem is this one’s a full job. Full contract. And you know there’s no slacking off on full contracts, sweetums. Get your buns up here. Go’s going over a new plan.”

Emily sighed, mumbling more commands. The lone empty corner of the room filled up, walls and panels shifting to reveal a bathing compartment, of which she shuffled into, turning on a hissing chemical shower.

“Alright, I’ll be there in a bit.”

While she was wasting time in meatspace, moving in a hopper to the offices, Emily poured over her latest book, *Minus Meatspace*, doing revisions, adding parts, removing parts, knowing she had a week to get it all done before the publisher wanted it. Her last book, *Deathspace*, had done surprisingly well, at least compared to the *Silicone Addendum*, which did poorly, at least for a member of the Squadron. However, Emily was essentially compiling her notes and theories into these little books for extra money, so it wasn’t exactly like she was eager to make a name for herself in the literary world. Unsurprisingly, in both cases, her biggest admirer, FDA, Flying Dropkick Adam, had made damn sure to put a glowing review of them on the markets they were distributed on. Kiss ass. Still, it helped a bit and, in a way, his recent obsession of her, while strange and somewhat creepy, was more beneficial to the other ‘deals’ or ‘partnerships’ other fuckers had tried to spring on her. Emmy was a paranoid girl to say the least, and after nearly having been iced legally by these fuckers, Emmy had simply disregarded anything that could benefit anyone else unless she was absolutely sure no one would sneak in a clause or technicality that would fuck her over.

Occasionally, when she stopped working, she did her daily check on the black markets to see what new inventory had come in, searching, scouring feverishly for what she had coveted for some time, but found nothing, just the usual. So, she would sigh in disappointment and then buy up some of the programs and gear that would be of use to her and sit, staring into space, still fuming about that bid. Some time ago, against all odds, what she had wanted had appeared, but before she could get it,



it was snatched up by someone from the offices, probably an executive or something. Against all common sense, yet very much enraged, she had tried to hunt down the mysterious buyer to fry the bastard, but any attempts had failed. Somehow what she wanted wasn't seen on the streets, and it was a unique, rare thing in these times, so it wasn't like it wouldn't be noticed. Eventually, she gave up, figuring it had been a higher up, as the only dog known to exist was Heisenberg, or Bergie, the cloned lapdog of the CEO, Sebastian Adder. And Adder was, for reasons unknown, fiercely protective of Bergie and his genetic makeup.

And yet, every time she'd look around, she'd see reminders, via images, dusty photos, and projects—drooling, looking at her with dumb eyes, wagging their tails, fluffy fur shaking, she didn't even mind the smell—so she avoided going out on the town, avoided looking outside, even now her eyes were shut, wishing one would materialize and lick her face just like when she was a little girl—

She opened her eyes to find the hopper was signaling for her to get out, to which she reluctantly did, climbing out and trotting up to the big shiny buildings, passed the automated droids and into the office proper. She muttered greetings and such with people she passed, but nothing beyond a few words. Instant Emily was an average girl, lanky, pale, face a stern doll-like mask topped with a short, but rough Edie Sedwick styled shock of tar colored hair, all wrapped in a rubber dark blue jumpsuit with the appropriate holes for the ports on her body, and sneakers. Emily trotted into Go's office proper, finding him waiting for her, sitting on his desk, smiling, Sunn, Sett, and the Doc sitting nearby.

“Emmy!” Go exclaimed way too loudly as she walked in. “How's my little breaker girl?!”

“Fuck off,” Emily answered, stopping to lean against a nearby wall, looking like her usually standoffish self. “And terrible.”

“Great!” Go rambled. “We've got a new contract, this one's a doozy, good numbers, good bonus, it'll be good prep for the beginning of the season!”

Sunn, who enjoyed watching and seeing how her team mates ticked, noted the fashion in which Emily suddenly perked up, eyes widening slightly, standing up straight, the faintest hint of interest, all with a

giggle. If there was a single thing Emily loved, it was tangoing with other BS crews, and other breakers. And dogs, of course, as Sunn definitely knew about that, but that was a secret known only to her Sett, and Emily, one that Emily believed only she had. Either way, Sunn's attention drifted back to Go, who was now going over the plan, the details, of which Jo and Dan had also appeared in the doorway, mainly to ask for clarification on certain parts or offer better alternatives and suggestions, and in the span of an hour, the Surf Squadron had hashed out a proper plan. The crew proceeded to divide to get to work.

Recordkeeper Jon was not having a good week. A week before his wife had divorced him, all while his friends had transferred from his office, and now he was living a chemical smelling shitbox next to the midnight transit, kept awake by it, not to mention the constant power failures thanks to the constant Sector Security raids on the block. The latest one had caused him to miss his alarm, and now his supervisor, a former dom by the name of Lethe was giving him shit and enjoying every bit of it. He was trying to explain what was going on, asking for some slack, some relief, but—

“I have no such substance for you Mr. Seid,” Lethe cut him off abruptly. “Four tardy slips this week. The DRC values promptness and reliability, something you've not given us this past week. And don't use your suicidal diagnosis as an excuse either!”

“I'm not suicidal, I'm just stressed! I said one little thing out of context—”

Lethe snorted in disbelief.

“Look, I'm having a bad week! M-my wife left me, I got a phony diagnosis,” Jon explained, near tears. “Please, I just need a moment—”

“Don't argue with me Mr. Seid,” Lethe cut him off again. “Get your ass up here or I will report you to Disciplinary for your insubordination!”

She hung up on him there, leaving him standing in his little shitbox, staring at the wall, sighing, before eventually going to dress.

Because the divorce had tanked his respectable 78% EmpRate to 34%, he couldn't filter out the invasive calls, so he wasn't surprised

when salesman fished him on a line to sell him stuff, and Jon couldn't hang up on him because that'd make his EmpRate go down more.

“Good morning's tranquility Mr. Seid! How are you today? I'm calling as our data shows that you, a Thoughtbase member, is currently living in the slums of the Worker's Paradise!” the salesman exclaimed. “Are you aware of the number of attacks and crimes committed in those areas? Why the number of terrorist attacks have doubled since last year! That's why you need a gun! How bout it Mr. Seid? A nice big powerful firearm! As you know IITI supports the right to bear arms! Wont you defend yourself today?”

No thanks, I don't have any money,” Jon mumbled, making his way out of the door and to the nearest transit.

“That's ok, Mr. Seid, we do payments too!” the salesman countered.

Jon felt his impatience rising. Lately he had been pretty aggressive, not at all depressed, like the doctors said. He didn't know why.

“I, uh, I'm having financial issues, and other problems,” Jon started, trying for pity, maybe the seller would fuck off—

“Don't worry Mr. Seid I have all your numbers in front of me and it looks like even if you made half of what you made now, you'd still be able to afford what I'm offering!” the salesman countered again, cutting through the act. Inside, Jon cursed again. Only good sellers had access to the numbers. Shit. “How bout it Mr. Seid? Hear me out and I'm sure you'll change your mind!”

Jon was now trying to worm his way into a packed transport, cramming himself between a worker in a puffy coldsuit, and a meaty Bloodhaus fighter.

“Great! Now let me tell you about the new RGB Blackballer! Big honking pistol! Cheap rounds on the market, can punch through people like nothing, just pump and dump! 15 round magazine with 45 caliber equivalent bullets and options to expand! Comes with rifle and automatic conversion kits! What do you say, Mr. Seid? Only 9,500, you order now, and I'll throw in all the essentials, carrying case, holster, extra magazine, the works!”

“I don't know if I can afford that—”

“We can do 12 payments of 791.66, or even 395.83 for 24 months!

“Even that’s a bit too much for me—”

The Bloodhaus fighter’s hard pecs kept jabbing Jon in the face, but he was glad to find he was at his stop.

“Ok how ‘bout, just for you, 36 payments of 263.88? I’ll throw in all the good stuff! Gotta sell off our inventory, you know the game, keep the money moving and all that. How ‘bout it?”

The transit hopper’s doors opened, and Jon stumbled out with a few others and fastwalked to his office. Feeling ever so slightly relieved, the words came out before the decision did.

“Uh, ok... why not?”

“Good man! You won’t regret this sir! Just authorize the order and I’ll handle the rest! Thanks again and have a good day Mr. Seid!”

The Department of Records and Census was a wasteland of offices, whining data machines, and mountains of papers. There was another accident with the record pile, so Jon took an extra minute getting to his desk, at his new position, in the “Loser’s Circle”, or LC, the crowd of paper pushers who were disliked or had low EmpRate scores. He had been kicked down there after his divorce. He had gotten to his office, going to get to work when Lethe appeared behind him, looming over him with shark like teeth and cruel eyes. Lethe was the floor manager and slave driver of the LC who moonlighted as a dominatrix for extra pay. She was a sexual beast in business attire and bleached power bun.

“Late again,” Lethe hissed threateningly. “You know you’re going to be making up those lost minutes on your spare time, right?”

“Yes ma’am,” Jon groveled like a whipped child, trying to work, all while Lethe heaped abuse on him, at some points restraining herself from doing something physical to him. Jon was sure she was going to start pressuring him for sexual favors if he didn’t stand up to her, but couldn’t, more so because sound-tracking his humiliation, adding to it, not to mention, was the audible guffawing of his new coworkers, credit scum he once decried, and now was one of. They had taken great liberty in enjoying his fall from grace. Eventually Lethe grew bored of Jon’s dead response and went away, but the members of the LC would hang around and make comments or ask dumb questions, questions designed

to remind Jon of his failures. A particularly painful barb from a fucker by the name of Jones, a claim of Diane Dixie, his ex, remarrying and getting a new job with Mankind Plus, was made manifest out of the corner of his eye, pictures, hidden, of Dixie in various stages of happiness, flashed the endless feeds, just out of view, or flickered out of focus of Jon's weary vision. And each time, Jon would see them, glimpse them, and do a double take, only to find nothing there, just more feed garbage.

The days blurred, Dixie appeared on the feeds, flickers here, flickers of a gone happiness. Some of them were new, some were of them, a few shifting from old times to new, Jon replaced by some other man. Her image seemed to follow Jon everywhere, even on the transits, in between business bulletins and broadcast on how the arms and security industries were having a rough quarter. He had to take medication now. They had changed his doctor to some pale man in black, Doc Stretcher, they called him. He always felt as if someone was watching him. Sometimes it'd be a camera, other times people. Just out of view, Jon never noticed the fashionable pair of searchers that watched and tailed him. Nor did he notice the maintenance guy for the shitty block he now called home wore some weird spacesuit. Either way, it was the same. He'd awake because of the sudden roar of the late-night transports through thin walls, his thinking was disrupted by constant outages, the smell of chemicals grew stronger, and day after day, Jon was hollowed out, scraped away, growing to be cold and dead inside.

And then one day something was put in.

It was a command. It started when Jon, going through the motions, growing numb to the pain, and his life, and the jeers, and the misfortune and the failure, when the gun arrived, popped into his inbox. On instinct, or something else, Jon had opened the package, doing so as if his hands were not his anymore. He assembled the gun in a half dead state, loading it, enjoying the look of it, unaware how he had been able to put it together, and then, the feeds spoke to him. His vision blurred. A person passed, and it was Diane, but not Diane. A person crudely warped into

Diane. The feeds screamed at him now with one command: “FREE THEM FROM THEIR LITTLE LIVES JON”.

Suddenly, the gun changed. As did his hand. As did most of his body, come to think of it. The gun had sprouted spines and tubes, and these spines and tubes had inserted into his hand. And his hand had changed, warping, sculpting flesh, fusing with the gun, and before Jon knew what was going on, he was rising, seeing Jones, the fucker, and Lethe, and the others of the LC, laughing, shooting the shit around the coffee dispenser, probably at Jon’s expense. It didn’t matter. They hadn’t seen the warped version of Jon emerge from his office, or his mutated arm and the gun in the all that meat, at least, until the first shot hit Lethe in the head. She had ballooned up and exploded. And when they, Jon got them too, and they too ballooned up and exploded, a few contorting, and dying with horrid screams and Jon moved about and cleared the LC, only vaguely aware of the alarms.

It had taken exactly five minutes for the nearest Sector Security outpost to respond, hoppers containing platoons of grunts came screaming to the sector, busting through walls and floors to get to where the anomaly was. It was a rampant bioweapon of some kind. Nasty piece of work, but all that mattered was that casualties were minimal. A young woman who had the misfortune of being the closest to the Loser’s Circle was cowering, sobbing, begging the creature that had been Jon to not shoot her with whatever the hell he had literally in his hand when the crash of gunfire, exploded Jon into messy hamburger. The grunts came in swiftly and put Jon down with the only casualties being the Loser’s Circle, but even then, many employees, including the above mentioned woman, found herself confronted with ads for bodyguards and security groups and firearms and the woman unhesitatingly put an order in for a new heartstopper, a nice honking pistol sold to her by a polite young woman miles away.

“Mission accomplished!” Go exclaimed, popping the top off of the bottle of champagne, spraying the others with it. “Fucking homerun!”

Go was rambling again, having just come off of fresh Sparker, having never taken off the receiver he had sold Jon the gun on since he did the deed, as if a good luck charm. The ensuing debriefing and report to the concerned parties detailed how “Instant” Emily had “handwritten” all of the gaslighting programs that manipulated the feeds, or Spaceman Dan’s little device that knocked out the power in just Jon’s box, or his collaborations with Doc Stretcher, mainly the device that pumped Doc’s special brew into Jon’s box as he slept, or the master stroke—the gun, which was engineered half bio, half technical, and last but not least was all because of the intel efforts of Sunn and Sett, whose trailing of the mark had enabled these great ideas.

In exchange, several security and firearms companies had given the Squadron their due, both in EmpRate and income, percentages as stipulated in the contract, from the resulting arm and security sales encouraged by what looked to be another bad egg cracking under the pressure of the Big Data, with some kickback towards the DRC for being cooperative and good sports. To celebrate, the Squadron went out on the town, to Locktown for drinks and food and celebratory laughs, not to mention plans for the upcoming season. Good times indeed.