

Slay Ride (S1, E36)

SFX: INTRO MUSIC

Rev: Hey, everybody. I am here solo today for the intro. We just got back from Fort Wayne PopCon, and everyone has very rightly retreated to their own homes and their own beds. So I will make this relatively quick.

But since I forgot to do this in December, I'd be lacking in my duties -- and it kinda makes me sad that the guys aren't here because they would have laughed at the fact that I just said "duties." Anyway, I'd be lacking in my duties if I didn't take a moment to plug everything we have going on on this, our first episode of 2019. So it's time to start the music.

SFX: TIME TO PLUG THE PODCAST MUSIC

Rev: There it is. So if you aren't following us yet, you can find us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram -- just search The Critshow. If you aren't following us on there, I highly suggest you do. Every week, Rachel puts out really cool album art and teaser images for that week's episode. She also posts about when we're going to stream, and our live show schedule, as well as some artists' links, Throwback Thursday quotes, and the occasional dice shaming. And we have got a lot of dice to shame. We're also on Twitch. We've been pretty lacking on there the last two months, but part of our goal for this next year is to do more live Twitch games, as well as jump on there and play video games some more with all of you. So you can find us on there also at The Critshow. We also now have a subreddit, so you can just go on to reddit and search The Critshow and you will find us there. And we're going to try to start building a community there, where people can talk about the game and they can talk about the show without the fear of spoiling for other people. If you haven't yet and you've got a moment, leave us a comment and review us on iTunes or wherever you listen to us. Those ratings and comments, they help us reach new listeners. It's very helpful. So thank you if you've done it already. And if you haven't done it yet, if you could take a moment, it really helps us out a lot. Also, a reminder that if you're an artist and you have any interest in being commissioned for banner art for us, send me a message at rev@thecritshowpodcast.com and let me know your commission fee for creating something akin to what we use now as our banner art. We've got two in the works right now. I'm really excited about them. And I'd love for just as much of our art as possible to come from listeners, so.

And lastly -- and kind of burying the lede here -- you can find us now on Patreon. And by now, I mean like right now. Like, if you are hearing this episode the day it went live, the Patreon has launched just a couple hours ago. We've got five different tiers for pledges. We've got all kinds of content and swag lined up, including a game run by Tass -- The Hero Salad, our Worlds in Peril game. So if you'd like more of The Critshow in your ear each month, head over to patreon/thecritshow and join us on our continued adventures as we explore other Powered by the Apocalypse games, and create Patreon-exclusive swag and content for our Monster of the Week story.

Speaking of our Monster of the Week story, I think I've given out all the information I have. I think we can let the music end.

SFX: TIME TO PLUG THE PODCAST MUSIC ENDS

Rev: Let me welcome you all to the first episode of 2019. Thank you, everyone, for joining us and for your continued support. And now -- say it with me -- it's time to let the recap roll.

SFX: RECAP MUSIC

Rev: NOEL: Thank you so much for rebooting my system.

Tass: "Who are you?"

Rev: NOEL: I am the Neuro Engine of Offensive Logistics. But you may call me NOEL. This is a very old research center.

Tass: "OK. What do you research?"

Rev: NOEL: All manner of things from magic to technology to creatures.

Tass: "Can you analyze what this thing was so that we can help get rid of it entirely so it stops attacking you?"

Rev: Some of the lights around the room start to blink as she tries to access her database.

Rev: NOEL: Error. That is strange. I cannot seem to access my database. Something inside my system seems to have been corrupted.

Teej: "Is there any way that I could fix that?"

Rev: T.J., roll 'Weird Science.' Because when this program opens, there are hieroglyphs, elemental tables, and just all these very strange things that are a combination of magic and a combination of, like, rune work and technology.

Teej: OK. I'm just going to use Luck.

Rev: All right.

Teej: Yeah.

Rev: And you're able to repair the system. And you actually find a file as you go down that has information about the creation of NOEL. And you can see that she was built in 1945. And you also see NOEL's creator, and it takes you by surprise because it's a name you recognize. It's James Francis Tincher -- your great grandfather.

SFX: RECAP MUSIC ENDS

Rev: The three of you are standing in this underground bunker beneath Santa's cottage. And T.J. is standing at the keyboard and monitor of this very old computer, and he's just standing still. He hasn't moved in about 15 seconds.

Jake: "Did you crack it?"

Teej: "Uh ... There's ... You guys need to take a look at this and tell me I'm -- I'm reading the same thing."

Tass: OK. I'll take a look.

Rev: Yeah. You look over his shoulder at the document that he is reading on the computer. It talks about how she was made, the year that she was made, and who made her. And you see that the name is James Francis Tincher.

Jake: "Ooh. Who's that?"

Teej: "That's ... That's Paw-Paw."

Jake: "Neat! You're a legacy!"

Teej: "I -- I -- I guess so? That's ... That's so weird that I didn't know this about him. Like, I mean, I knew that he was, you know, in the war and everything, but I didn't think ... I wonder if that was like a cover story, or something."

Tass: "Oh, he's like part of the -- wow. OK. OK."

Teej: "Yeah. Because he was like part of some, like, expeditionary forces or something. And this is ... This is quite amazing to me. I really don't know a lot about my lineage and everything, but this is really ... This is really something. I'm genuinely shocked."

Rev: And NOEL has finished her rebooting sequence.

Rev: NOEL: I do not mean to eavesdrop, but I heard you say that your grandfather was in the expeditionary force. Is that correct?

Teej: "Yeah."

Rev: NOEL: I do not think you quite comprehend the places he was exploring.

Teej: "What do you mean?"

Rev: NOEL: A little known detail about the IPT is that it did not originally stand for Indiana Paranormal Task-force. That is where Margaret set up her station. The original name was the Inter-Dimensional Paranormal Task-force.

Tass: "Oh dang."

Rev: NOEL: There are other worlds. And your grandfather, after he created me, explored them.

Teej: "That's dope as hell."

Jake: "That is dope as hell."

Tass: "That's -- that's ... That's dope as hell."

Jake: "Is Paw-Paw still around?"

Teej: "No, he ... I don't ... NOEL, is Paw-Paw still around? Because I mean, as far as I know, he died a long time ago. I wasn't even born when he died."

Rev: NOEL: He did not return from his last expedition.

Teej: "Where was that to?"

Rev: NOEL: It was to Universe 342.

Jake: "What's that one?"

Rev: NOEL: Uncharted. He had not come back with the information about it.

Jake: "Makes sense in retrospect, yeah."

Teej: "So should we go there? Should we go to Universe 342?"

Tass: "Um ... My vote's no. Probably no."

Jake: "Let's put a pin in it."

Tass: "Yeah."

Jake: "Let's write that one down in the agenda book and see if we can't pencil it in somewhere."

Teej: "OK. I'm writing it down right now."

Jake: "OK."

Tass: Everyone, he's literally writing it down right now.

Rev: It's okay. It's on his erase board. It'll be gone before the evening's over.

Teej: Only on accident.

Rev: Yes, exactly. As he reaches for his Code Red.

Jake: "OK. So now that you're rebooted, do you know what the storm thing was?"

Rev: NOEL: Accessing ... I cannot find anything in my database that matches the description that you have given me, or the informational readings that I have acquired

while I was down. But I can give you this piece of information: the point of origin of the storm, both times it has appeared.

Rev: And some coordinates come up on her screen.

Jake: Are they -- is it just like, written coordinates? Or is it like a point on a map? Can we see where it is?

Rev: It's written coordinates.

Jake: Can I Google on NOEL?

Rev: You cannot, no. Her systems are too old right now.

Jake: "Anybody know where that is?"

Teej: I'm going to go ahead and pull out my phone and type in the coordinates and see where it's at.

Rev: Yeah, it's about a half hour from where you guys are right now.

Teej: "We could easily get there if we, I don't know, got some kind of transport."

Tass: "Let me look at that." I want to see like, are we actually really literally in the North Pole? Or where in the ... Where in the world are we?

Rev: Yes, you are very close to the North Pole. You're not exactly at it, but you can see that it is a place where tourists would be able to get there.

Tass: Oh, dang.

Rev: You know, it's close enough for them to call it the North Pole and for people to come and visit Santa's workshop.

Tass: Wow. Cool. "Yeah, if we're gonna do something about this, that would be the most sensible place to check. If it's going to keep popping up in the same place then, you know, it's as good a place as any to start."

Jake: "Sure. NOEL, are there any, like, snowmobiles or anything around here?"

Rev: NOEL: I do believe there is an old cache of transport equipment and traversal equipment, but I do not know the condition of it, currently.

Jake: "Well, we can check on that."

Tass: "Yeah, I think we're going to need ... If we're adventuring here, we're gonna need better clothes, and something -- something to get us there faster."

Rev: NOEL: It would be in the basement of the toy workshop.

Tass: "Thank you very much."

Rev: NOEL: Yes, of course. You will be able to communicate with me throughout. Now that I have been powered back up, I have been able to reconnect to all the other buildings within the village.

Teej: "All right. We'll give you a shout if we need anything."

Jake: "Oh, have you been able to -- I don't know how this works. Do you control the robots here?"

Rev: NOEL: Yes.

Jake: "Are Santa and Mrs. Claus like totally out of commission? Because the elves were freaking out that Santa was dead."

Rev: NOEL: Yes. I have calmed them down and I have started construction on a new Mr. and Mrs. Claus. It seemed that their systems were far too damaged from the cold.

Jake: "All right. Let's go get snowmobiles."

Tass: "All right." I think we'll head that way and look in the shop.

Rev: Yeah. So you guys head over to the workshop and go inside. And you can see that some of the elves are back to work. You go through a curtained door that says 'Employees Only.' And there's actually another workshop. There are elves piecing together a new Mr. and Mrs. Claus. And they have just finished putting together a familiar looking elf. And he powers on.

Rev: JINGLES: Hey, man. Why'd you let me fall?

Tass: "What's up, Jingles?"

Rev: JINGLES: Oh, man. That was messed up.

Jake: "I'm sorry, Jingles. We were ... We were trying to save the entire village, and I didn't mean to let you fall. But I messed up. I'm sorry."

Rev: JINGLES: OK. Well, good luck I guess, man.

Teej: "Yeah. Jingles, do you know where there's any like, transportation around here? Like in the basement, is what we're told. Do you know where that's at?"

Rev: JINGLES: Oh, yeah. Just go back through that next door. It goes into the basement.

Teej: OK. We'll head on through the next door.

Rev: And he actually goes over and he taps a number into the door, and it opens.

Rev: JINGLES: You guys need anything else?

Teej: "He's so helpful."

Jake: "He is. Yeah, not that I can think of, but do you want to tag along with us just in case?"

Rev: JINGLES: I don't know, man. You gonna let me fall again? I don't know if I can trust you. You broke my heart, once.

All: *laugh*

Teej: "I think maybe if we don't, you know, pick him up, you should be fine."

Jake: "Maybe. I mean, I'll warn you, it's a dangerous line of work we're in. So if you come along, I can promise you thrills. But I can't promise you safety."

Rev: JINGLES: Yeah, all right.

All: *laugh*

Rev: JINGLES: You'd think NOEL would have programmed free will out of me. But, well. Look at me go!

Jake: Just pictured him grabbing a very small shotgun off a rack.

Tass: With a cork in the end.

Teej: Yeah, right?

Rev: Yeah, so you guys go down into the basement. Who wants to be in charge here?

Jake: In what capacity?

Rev: Who knows?

Teej: I will, then. Why not? I want to have some fun.

Rev: T.J., roll Luck.

Teej: Oh, God. And I used some of it. Not cool, T.J. Not cool. That would be a seven.

Rev: There is one working snowmobile, and three sleds, and two snowsuits.

Teej: What kind of sleds are they?

Rev: Like plastic round ones.

Jake: "Well, not ideal, huh? I mean, I think you guys take the suits, because I'm probably the most durable."

Teej: "Hardy."

Jake: "Yeah. Hardy of any of us. And also, I just love the visual of you being like the little brother from A Christmas Story, so."

Tass: "I don't know. Hey, T.J., can you fashion like a heated suit or something? Out of what you have here?"

Teej: "I have a better idea, actually. Let's see if we can get NOEL to lend us some reindeer. And I'm gonna make us a sleigh."

Tass: "Go on."

Jake: "Yeah, I'm listening. I'm all ears."

Teej: "So we've got the snowmobile, we've got these three sleds, and we've got lots of reindeer. I assume eight at least. Maybe nine."

Tass: *laughs*

Teej: "If not nine, I'll make nine out of a bunch of elves."

Jake: My God. They're just like Voltron, except they turn into one reindeer.

Rev: He's like Human Centipede-ing elves together to make a reindeer.

Tass: Jake went Voltron, and I'm thinking Human Centipede elves in a reindeer form.

Teej: I like the Voltron idea way better.

Tass: Yeah, that's better.

Teej: Especially since Legendary Defender was just out and I loved it. "Yeah. So like, I could make us a sled out of all of this right here, and then have the reindeer pull it and then ... Yeah."

Tass: "OK. NOEL, is that cool?"

Rev: NOEL: I heard my name. Did you call?

Tass: "T.J., give your spiel."

Teej: "Yeah. NOEL, I need you to program the reindeer to stop being tourist attractions and actually pull a sled."

Rev: NOEL: You're going to use them as a means of conveyance?

Teej: "Correct."

Rev: NOEL: Very well.

Teej: "All right. Cool."

Rev: All right. T.J., roll 'Weird Science.'

Teej: Yep. Will do. That would be a fourteen.

Rev: So what is your one requirement?

Teej: I'll need help beyond the hunters on my team to finish it.

Jake: All right. So I think what we get next is a montage of Jake corralling reindeer, T.J. and Jingles working on a sleigh, Tass handing them tools. Jingles goes out to the workshop and gathers up some other elves. T.J., describe what you have created.

Teej: It's a sleigh that is robotic reindeer powered. And it has all these really cool functions, including jet propulsion.

Jake: Does it have the cookie dispenser from the sleigh from The Santa Clause?

Teej: No. But it does have a Claus-o-Meter which measures the Christmas spirit of the world.

Rev: *laughs* Does it have a thing that says 'air brakes,' ala Ernest Saves Christmas?

All: *laugh*

Rev: All right. So you guys have created this sled that is pulled by reindeer.

Tass: I know what I had been doing this entire time.

Rev: Yeah?

Tass: Looking around for anything that looks like giant feathers. I don't know, anything from like toys that they might be making. Anything. And I just need ... I need like four big-ass feathers.

Rev: Roll Luck. The time and place of giant fans for children's gifts is way past.

Tass: That's true. What if I don't technically have Luck?

Rev: Oh, that's fair. You don't have Luck.

Tass: Is it just a straight roll?

Rev: I think you get nothing.

Tass: Oh, nothing?

Rev: But you can tell us what you wanted.

Tass: I just -- I wanted to do that. And then I wanted to have one of the elves help me make a license plate that says 'Snow Gobbler.'

Teej: *laughs*

Tass: But I can't have it. So, you know, sometimes you don't get what you want and you learn that around Christmas.

Jake: *weeepy* Merry, Merry Christmas, everybody.

Rev: The animatronic Santa comes back online and opens up his bag and hands you four big feathers.

Tass: Yeah! I give him a big hug.

Rev: Because it's a Christmas miracle.

Teej: "Are you guys ready to go to the spot?"

Jake: "Yeah."

Teej: I'm going to set my phone up, because within the cockpit is a phone charger and GPS.

Rev: Yeah, of course.

Teej: Right. That's attached to a world monitor, and all that good stuff. Just like Santa would use. And, "Jingles, you good?"

Rev: JINGLES: Yeah, man. Let's roll.

Teej: "All right. I can't run this."

All: *laugh*

Teej: "One of one of you has got to run this. I've set up a password to start it, though."

Jake: "Oh, my ... OK, I'll do it."

Teej: "OK."

Jake: "What's the password?"

Teej: "OK. You ready?"

Jake: "Yeah."

Teej: "Repeat after me."

Jake: "OK."

Teej: "Now Dasher."

Jake: "Now Dasher."

Teej: "Now Prancer."

Jake: "Now Prancer."

Teej: "No ..."

Jake: "Now you already got -- you already messed it up. You already screwed it up."

Rev: The system shuts down because the password was entered incorrectly.

Jake: "All right. I'll try it again."

Teej: "All right."

Jake: "Now Dasher, now Dancer, now Prancer and Vixen. On Comet, on Cupid, on Donner and Blitzen."

Rev: And the engine roars to life. So who's driving this thing?

Jake: I guess I am.

Rev: All right. So Jake, roll 'Act Under Pressure.'

Jake: OK. Eleven.

Tass: Nice.

Rev: You are able to steer this thing across the tundra in the direction you want to go. Everybody stays on board. The music is playing in the background -- for my personal taste, I think it's the intro music to Christmas Vacation: Holiday Road.

Tass: Yeah. Nice.

Rev: As you sail across the snow toward your destination. How close to it do you want to stop?

Jake: I guess it depends what I can see on approach. Like, if we start getting up and I can see, you know, roiling storm clouds or something, then I would -- I would just have to eyeball it, I guess.

Rev: All right. Roll 'Read a Bad Situation.'

Jake: Can't do that. That's a three.

Rev: Yeah. Seems like you should be able to go right on top of the spot where this is created and not have any problems.

Jake: All right. That failure also levels me up.

Rev: Oh, good. What are you gonna take?

Jake: I think I'm going to take +1 Charm, so that not all of us are at a negative Charm. I guess I don't know what Tass will be at, eventually.

Tass: Hey, thank you very much. I'm at a solid goose egg right now.

Jake: That's true. This is just -- I've been infused with a little bit of holiday cheer, and I'm a little bit more charming now.

Tass: Aww, I love that.

Rev: You've got Santa's twinkle in your eye, now. It's because NOEL replaced your eye with a cybernetic eye from a Santa Claus.

Teej: Sweet!

Tass: Good.

Teej: That's hilariously awesome.

Jake: All right. I'll take us right up to the spot on the GPS, then.

Rev: So you guys come cresting over this hill in this rocket powered sled. And you come crashing down, as you ramp over this hill, onto an igloo. And you hear shouting from inside. And three people scatter out and they see you. And two of them draw very long swords, and the third one looks like she's starting to cast a spell.

Jake: Ooh. I'm going to gamble on the good nature of people. I'm going to go, "Oh, my God. I'm so sorry. Are you guys okay? I totally lost sight of where I was going."

Rev: Jake, you take 2 points of damage.

Jake: Yeah, OK.

Rev: As a huge gust of wind fires and blows you backwards off of the sleigh.

Jake: Whoops.

Rev: And you can tell it came from the woman in the back, who begins to cast something different. Tass, T.J., what are you guys doing?

Tass: I think I'm gonna, like, just roll backwards out of the sleigh to try to get it between me and them.

Rev: All right. Roll 'Act Under Pressure.'

Tass: Six. Good. Good, good, good.

Rev: You go to roll backwards off of the sleigh and your foot gets caught in the feathers. And you end up hanging upside down off the back, with your legs stuck between the cross-hatching of the feathers.

Tass: Good.

Rev: T.J., what are you doing?

Teej: I'm going to do what Tass was trying to do, but better.

Rev: OK. The gauntlet has been thrown. Roll 'Act Under Pressure.'

Teej: You got it.

Tass: First of all, T.J., shut up.

Teej: Yep. *rolls*

Jake: Oh, boy.

Teej: You were saying? With this sweet thirteen I just rolled?

Tass: Shut up, is what I say.

Rev: Yeah. In fact, he actually steps on your groin as he goes to jump.

Tass: "Oh, my nuts!"

Rev: And yeah. He flips on the ground behind the Snow Gobbler. Jake?

Jake: I got knocked off the back too, right? Are we all on the same side?

Rev: Correct. You are all at the back.

Jake: I'll dislodge Tass, I guess.

Rev: OK. Yeah. You can get him down, no problem.

Tass: "Oh, thanks."

Rev: And you see that one of the swordsmen is advancing around the right side. And you don't see the other one.

Jake: I want to just stomp kick the sleigh, to smash into the one that's coming around.

Tass: *laughs*

Rev: All right. Roll 'No Limits.'

Teej: Sweet.

Tass: That's so hardcore.

Jake: Yeah. Yeah, that's a thirteen.

Rev: So what happens with a roll that high?

Jake: 'No Limits' on a 12 or more, you continue to ignore your body's limits for 30 seconds.

Rev: So you have super strength for 30 seconds.

Jake: Accurate.

Tass: Damn.

Rev: So you kick this -- and we go into slow motion as you kick this -- and you hear very softly coming from the sleigh:

Rev: JINGLES: Oh, fuck me.

All: *laugh*

Rev: As you boot this sleigh directly forward.

Jake: *laughs*

Teej: "Jingles, nooo!" But it's slow-mo, so it's, *slow motion* "Jingles, noo ..."

Rev: And this sleigh clobbers this guy -- it rolls over him. You see all of the electronic reindeer get pulled along with it and they kind of stomp on him as they go. And he is bleeding very badly, laying on the ground. He looks like he has a broken leg. And his sword is laying next to him. Tass?

Tass: I think I'm going to run over to that guy and essentially kick the sword further away. And I'm just going to hold the shotgun over him and say, "Just don't move, dude." And post up there for a moment.

Rev: OK. So as you kick the sword away and you kind of hunker down with your shotgun -- I don't think you need to roll for that -- you see, in his open mouth, a pair of fangs.

Tass: Oh...

Rev: T.J.

Teej: Do I see the other swordsman somewhere?

Rev: You see him coming around the far side of the crushed igloo. T.J.?

Teej: I'm going to go ahead and attack the guy with the sword. I'm going to actually slide on my knees and zap him from below.

Rev: Oh, from like a land down under.

Tass: Uh-oh.

Rev: God. All right. Roll 'Kick Some Ass.'

Teej: All right.

Tass: *laughs*

Teej: OK. So, you remember when I had that thirteen with that really cool 'Act Under Pressure'?

Rev: Yeah.

Teej: I now have a three.

Rev: You run at this guy and you slide to try to attack him from the deep, and your foot catches on a piece of ice. And you just fall forward and bust your nose on the ground. You take 1 point of damage, and you are laying on the ground in front of this guy.

Teej: Owie.

Rev: As T.J. falls to the ground, the sky starts to light up. And you can tell that there is fire coming from somewhere, and it's starting to form in the sky.

Tass: Oh, God.

Jake: Can I tell where the magic person went? Are there any tracks or indication of their direction?

Rev: Roll 'Read a Bad Situation.'

Jake: No. That's a 4.

Rev: So you try to look for where the caster went. And you're making some pretty heavy sounds as you walk, because you still have this super strength, and you're knocking into stuff. It is not a quiet approach. And the fire that you start to see in the sky begins to condense more above the area that you're at. Tass, what are you doing?

Tass: Is this one still pretty well pinned, or does he still look like he could potentially be lively?

Rev: He could be lively if he could get up. He kind of got ran over by this.

Tass: OK. I hate to do this without getting any information, but I think if everybody's kind of scattering here, so I think I just would take a shot. Just level it at his head and say, "Sorry, brah."

Rev: Yeah. So you shoot him in the head and there is gore everywhere and he is twitching.

Tass: "This one was a vampire."

Jake: "What? Why?"

Tass: "I don't know!"

Jake: "No. Yeah, you're right."

Rev: T.J. The one above you starts to swing his sword down.

Teej: I'm going to roll out of the way.

Rev: Roll 'Act Under Pressure.'

Teej: That's more like it. That would be nine.

Rev: So you can get out of the way, but you're gonna lose your wrist blaster. Or you can get partially out of the way and only get scraped by his weapon. Or you can get out of the way, and it's going to open up a path to Tass.

Teej: I'm going to go ahead and take a scraping.

Rev: All right. So you take 1 point of damage. You're able to roll most of the way out of the way, and the blade comes down just on your shoulder and glances down into the snow.

Teej: Owie.

Rev: Jake?

Jake: I mean I ... At least I think I know that the magic dude is making the fire in the sky. I just don't know where he's gone or how to deal with it. "Anybody see where the magic dude went?"

Tass: "No." I am trying to glance around, but I'm still kind of behind the sleigh at this point.

Teej: I'm in the middle of a fight, so.

Jake: All right. Then I'm going to go help T.J., instead. So I'm gonna run over and just try and take that vampire's head off.

Rev: Roll 'Kick Some Ass.'

Jake: Eleven.

Rev: All right. What's your extra effect?

Jake: I think suffer less harm. I'm not doing super hot right now, so.

Rev: Yeah, you exchange harm with him, and you take 1 point of damage. And your hammer cracks him in the side of the head and he staggers to the side, but does not go down. Tass?

Tass: Samesies. I'm gonna go ahead and sprint that way, and if they're out of the way, I want to try to level and clip him.

Rev: All right. Roll 'Kick Some Ass.'

Tass: Oh. Cup of shame ...

Jake: God. As he runs over and levels the gun, I am just under my breath going, "Please don't shoot me. Please don't shoot me. Please don't shoot me ..."

Rev: You're in luck. He doesn't shoot you. He runs up to use the shotgun on this swordsman, and the swordsman snakes an arm out and grabs him, and holds the sword to his neck.

Tass: "Shit!"

Rev: T.J., you notice that the storm of fire above looks like it's getting ready to break.

Teej: Since I'm on the ground, go prone and aim carefully at this guy to zap him with my blaster.

Rev: All right. Roll 'Kick Some Ass.'

Teej: Eight.

Rev: So you raise the electro-blaster ... What's your health at?

Teej: Uh, four.

Rev: As you raise the electro-blaster, this swordsman sees what you're getting ready to do, and he takes the sword away from Tass's neck and throws it at you. You take 2 points of damage, and it pins you to the ground. But your blast goes off. It goes through Tass and through this guy. Tass, you take 2 points of electrical damage. But he takes 3, and he falls to the ground, unconscious.

Tass: "Oh, shit."

Teej: *weakly* "Oh, God. Help. Oh, God. This hurts so bad."

Rev: Jake?

Jake: Oh, shit. Um ...

Teej: *wheeze* I'm doing that 'lady who fell off the grape' stuff. Ah, darn it. That's an old -- that's an old video. I don't know if anybody will get that.

Jake: Man. I go over to T.J. and ... I don't know. Like, "I could try to heal you, but if I don't do a perfect job, I die instead, like ... Shit." I think I want to flip the sleigh over and put it over T.J. Like, "Just hunker down in this. Like, this is your -- your shell for the moment." No, actually, I guess I'll gesture for Tass and I'll kind of flip -- and Jingles -- flip it upside down and pull it down over all three of us. Like, if we can see that this firestorm, it seems like it's about to pop off and there's no cover or anything. Just hide us under this thing.

Rev: All right. So you grab a hold of the sleigh and essentially like suplex it backwards over the group of you. Jingles is still inside of it.

Rev: JINGLES: Oh, God. This is -- this is chaos.

Rev: And he is inside with you. You slam it down. And as it slams into the snow, you hear the firestorm break. And fire sizzles off of the metal of the sleigh. And you can hear it melting the snow outside. But for the moment, you seem to be safe. So here you are. The three of you are hunkered under this flipped over sleigh. Fire is raining down around you outside. And T.J. is pinned to the ground with a large sword through him.

Jake: "My limited medical knowledge says don't pull the thing that stabbed you out, until you've got a professional that can treat it. So, yeah. I guess in a second here, once it sounds like it's subsided a bit out there, Tass, you can follow me out. We'll go out there

and we'll try and kill him. Maybe Saul can take over a vampire for a second. But, T.J., you stay here. You stay undercover."

Teej: *weakly* "You got it."

Jake: So, wait until the burning sound fizzles out out there. And then kind of dig out underneath it a little bit, and get back outside the sleigh.

Rev: All right. Roll 'Read a Bad Situation' to try to be prepared to get out there at the right time.

Jake: Eight.

Rev: You get a hold 1.

Jake: I'm just happy that I succeeded on a Sharp roll. I guess 'are there any dangers we haven't noticed?' But kind of like the reverse of that. Like, is the danger that I know was there done yet?

Rev: Yeah. Yeah, I will take that. You can tell when the storm is over, when this fire rain has stopped. And when it stops, you guys start to dig to get out. What do you want to do once you get out from underneath the sleigh?

Jake: I think that actually before we dig, I want to call Saul and tell him, like, "There are two mostly dead vampires out there. If you can take one of them over and help us." Once we get out there, I think I want to look around and try and kind of find the epicenter and see if I can find the spell caster.

Rev: All right. Roll 'Investigate a Mystery.'

Jake: Sharp roll, Sharp rolls ...

Tass: I believe in you!

Jake: No, you shouldn't. Fool. Four.

Tass: Oof.

Rev: Saul darts over to one of the bodies and goes inside of it and starts to stand up. And you see the storm begin to reform.

Tass: I want to run towards the broken igloo.

Rev: All right. So you go running towards the igloo. And you come around the backside of the rubble of the igloo, and she is there.

Tass: I'm gonna try to like, shoot her. I'm gonna kneecap her. Like, I want to bring her down without shooting her in the face and killing her, you know what I mean?

Rev: All right. Roll 'Act Under Pressure' to shoot her in the desired area.

Tass: Eleven plus my zero is eleven.

Rev: All right. You do. You fire the shotgun and it hits her in the side of the knee, and she buckles sideways. And she loses her concentration. She did not make her concentration check. And you notice that the fire in the sky vanishes. And she is on the ground, clutching at her knee.

Tass: "Hey, we didn't come here to fight, but you brought this on. Hold still, and we won't kill you."

Rev: VAMPIRE: You will die.

Tass: "Why?!"

Rev: VAMPIRE: Because he ordered it.

Tass: "Oh. Good enough for me." I'm going to take another shot.

Rev: All right. Roll 'Kick Some Ass.'

Tass: Five.

Rev: You kind of give this debonair smile and say, "That's good enough for me" and you point the shotgun down. And faster than she should be able to, she snatches it and pulls you down and sinks her teeth into your neck.

Tass: Oh, no.

Rev: You take 1 point of damage. Jake, you see Tass run around the igloo. You hear a shotgun blast, and then you hear him scream.

Jake: I teleport to him.

Rev: And he is in the embrace of a vampire.

Jake: Um ...

Rev: Which is the title of my new book.

Jake: OK. I am going to pull out the garrote and try and get it around her head and just decapitate her.

Tass: I forgot about the garrote.

Jake: Yeah. I don't know what kind of vampire she is, but I know that they can take over the people they've bitten. So just eliminate her as quick as possible.

Rev: All right. Roll 'Protect Someone.'

Jake: I think I'm just gonna use 'Never Again' and treat it as a 10.

Rev: OK.

Jake: And so I guess the extra effect will be that I inflict harm on the enemy -- to decapitate.

Rev: You're able to run up behind them, and you throw one side of the garrote ... Essentially between the little gap of their bodies pressed together, so that the wire's on both sides of her. And you pull backwards and her head comes off. And it is just hanging on Tass's neck, still.

Jake: Oh my God.

Tass: "Oh! Get it off! Get it off! Oh God."

Rev: It's like that scene in Evil Dead where his head is just biting his hand, and he's like flinging it around.

Jake: OK. I'm going to roll up the garrote and pull her head off of Tass's neck, I guess.

Rev: Saul comes running around the corner with his fists up, like the Notre Dame mascot. Ready to fight, cause his sword is in T.J.

Jake: "I think we took care of her, Saul. But thanks for being there. That was not sarcasm. It sounded like that. I'm genuinely thanking you for coming around, ready to fight."

Rev: SAUL: Well, all right. Well, I guess I'll just get out of here --

Jake: "No."

Tass: "No, no, no!"

Rev: It falls to the ground, he floats away ... No.

Jake: "Yeah, no. Keep him for a while, because at the very least we're gonna need one of them to question, and I intend to kill this one. She seems the most dangerous." I might have already killed her, but for good measure, I'm going to get a stake and a mallet and plunge it through her heart, too. Just in case.

Rev: Yeah. So you pull a stake and a mallet out from the supplies that you guys have, and her body turns to ash.

Tass: "Oh, there's the one that I -- I obliterated his face and his head. But like, stake that too, probably?"

Jake: "Do we want to steak him, or do we want to take him for questioning and keep Saul controlling the other one?"

Tass: "Well, I think it's gonna be a while before we can question the one that's head is mush. So maybe we use Saul to just get him tied up and, you know, impossible to escape. And then let Saul come out of him and question that. You know what I mean?"

Jake: "OK." Then I'll stake that other one.

Rev: You go over to the other one, and it's not there.

Tass: I'm going to sprint over to check on T.J.

Rev: He's still there. He is underneath, with not a care in the world.

Jake: Are there tracks leading away from where it was?

Rev: Roll 'Investigate a Mystery.'

Jake: Thought so. Thought you might want that. Get these out of my sight.

Tass: Oh, my God.

Jake: I have failed.

Tass: Do you even have the option to level up to put +1 in Sharp?

Jake: I do. And I will.

Rev: In about 30 more seconds.

Jake: Yup. In precisely two more rolls.

Rev: You guys have not leveled up this much, I think, since ... Was it Hawaii or Eye of Horus that you guys leveled up a ton?

Teej: I think it was Eye of Horus.

Tass: It's because they're getting all of my level up rolls, obviously.

Rev: Well, they're rolling your move that you normally do.

Tass: Yeah, that's true.

Rev: What'd you get?

Jake: I got a six.

Rev: Yeah. You don't see any sign of him.

Tass: "OK. How the hell do we get T.J. somewhere safe without killing him? Is this you teleporting us? Or at least just teleporting him, and I can drive the rig back?"

Jake: "I hesitate to leave you alone when we know that there is a vampire on the loose right here."

Tass: "Yeah. Fair."

Jake: "Where should I teleport T.J.? Like, all the way back to headquarters? Or do you think NOEL's got a way to heal him? Surely this place has some kind of medical abilities."

Tass: "Well, I mean we know IPT probably has werewolf serum, at least. Or at least staff on hand, if they're out of that."

Jake: "All right. I'll take him all the way back to headquarters." Is jingles a thing? Can I put Jingles in my pocket dimension? Does Jingles breathe?

Rev: He does not.

Tass: He's just like carrying luggage. I don't think he counts.

Jake: "This will be interesting, Jingles. I'm going to put you in a special carrying space I have. And I've never put anything sentient in there, so it'll be cool to hear what it's like in there."

Rev: JINGLES: Oh. OK.

Jake: "Or, alternatively, you stay here. That's ... Those are -- that's the only options I got for you."

Rev: JINGLES: Like, just here? Just outside in the snow?

Jake: "Yeah. Right -- right here."

Tass: "We assume you can't drive this thing back?"

Rev: JINGLES: Yeah. I'm not old enough. You have to be 600 in elf years to drive.

Tass: "OK."

Rev: JINGLES: Next year though, baby. I'm excited.

Tass: "599, huh?"

Rev: JINGLES: Yeah.

Tass: "Good, good."

Teej: I'm liking Jingles's backstory, here. It's great.

Rev: JINGLES: Uh, yeah. I guess take me with you.

Jake: All right. I'll put Jingles in the pocket dimension.

Rev: SAUL: While you guys are gone, what do you want me to do?

Tass: "Shit. Should I go back with him? That seems like a terrible, terrible idea."

Jake: "Man, I don't know. I mean, we've lost the one guy, but I hate to leave and an alive vampire body around when we don't have to. So I'm tempted to say that Saul, you should just vacate this body, we kill it, and then we go."

Tass: "Yeah. Yeah, I think that's the best."

Jake: All Right. I'll do that.

Rev: So Saul just kind of stands there and like opens his arms and puts his head up, as much as he can, underneath the sleigh.

Rev: SAUL: OK. I'm gonna do it, I guess.

Jake: "God, this still feels very bad. Like, even though I know how it's gonna go. It just feels bad." And then I stab him in the chest with it.

Rev: SAUL: *wails*

Rev: And the body turns to ash. In the place where the body was is Saul's little light floating.

Rev: SAUL: That's better.

Jake: I'll open up my sleeve so he can fly back inside. Because that seems to be where he lives.

Rev: SAUL: Cozy.

Jake: And now I'll try to teleport us back to headquarters.

Rev: All right. Roll 'Angel Wings.'

Jake: Eight. Man, I hate that it stipulates that you are all separated.

Tass: *laughs*

Jake: If I could choose to just let Tass go somewhere else, I would. Um ... I mean, yeah, it's gotta be all together, in the same place. Just the wrong place.

Rev: All right. Jake, roll a d6.

Jake: OK ... Five. I hate that look. *laughs*

Rev: So you teleport, and you have chosen the option that you all end up in the same place -- but in the wrong place. And the heat overwhelms you because you guys have been out in the cold for so long. And you appear on the ground, and it is very soft and plush. And it's warm. And there are a pair of feet in front of you. And you start to look up, and you're Strohm's foyer.

Rev: STROHM: Well, boys. I was just thinking about calling you.

SFX: OUTRO MUSIC

SFX: RADIO FLIPS THROUGH CHANNELS

Rev: Sorry to interrupt your regularly scheduled end of episode music. But we actually wanted to leave you with the Hero Salad origin story, which will give you all the information you'll need to know for the first episode of Hero Salad, debuting on our Patreon later next week. So if you've got 15 minutes, sit back, relax, and enjoy the origin of the Hero Salad.

SFX: HERO SALAD INTRO MUSIC

Tass: Welcome to Guardian City. From the entertainment district of Lockhaven to the haunted islets of the Hannelar Keys, every section of this city has its own amazing quirk

that draws a crowd for work, for play, or for study. And while these unique attributes define each district, there is one feature that can be boasted of every section of this, the largest city in the world: superheroes.

SFX: HERO SALAD MUSIC CONTINUES

Tass: They flock to Guardian City from all over the world for personal gain, to protect the innocent, and many other reasons. Of course, heroes wouldn't be necessary if there weren't villains.

SFX: HERO SALAD MUSIC FADES

Tass: For every person attempting to do good, there is someone that is willing to do anything, no matter the cost, to get what they want. Gangs of metas have filled every corner of the city, such as The Chrome Bones, The Spawn of Ares, and The Seventh Circle Motor Club. Heroes have been forced to band together over the generations, forming teams to battle the constant threats against both the city and the world. The best known groups are praised by the masses far more than even movie stars. Two groups in particular have risen to status so high, some consider them nearly godlike. One group is The Vigilant. The other, you are about to learn about in great detail. Because today, we start the tragic tale of the fall of The Hero Syndicate, and the rise of the Hero Salad.

SFX: COMIC BOOK WHOOSH

Tass: The Hero Syndicate consists of the unbreakable Pillar of Justice, the noble leader of the team. Spine-Grapple, the rough and tumble second-in-command and the best hand-to-hand fighter in Guardian City. Empathion, the chill as hell emotion controller. The roaring Lioness, an amazing scout -- and the most ferocious member of the team. Beat Cop, the liaison to the GCPD and the best strategist out there. Divinity, the stunning and serene healer of the team. Sharpshot, the sassy rifleman -- lauded as the best sniper on the planet. Sonic Squall, whose piercing screams can bring the mightiest villains to their knees. Tussler, whose agility and confidence keep her three steps ahead of every attack. Lady Tarot, the ancient fortune teller extraordinaire.

And the three with whom we will spend most of our time: The First Line of Defense, living heart of Guardian City. Sindr, the charismatic energy bomb-slinging alien. And Encumbrance, the master of illusion.

SFX: COMIC BOOK WHOOSH

Tass: The final day of The Hero Syndicate begins at Syndicate HQ, a massive skyscraper at the center of West Haven -- a district called The Needles by locals. Enter the Pillar of Justice. He is tall, lanky, and lithe with muscle, and a square jaw in which you could sharpen a knife. But for real, though, it's so unbreakable that you could actually sharpen a knife on it. He walks into the team's briefing room and behind him trail the three newest members of the Syndicate: Encumbrance, Sindr, and the First Line of Defense. He stands in front of the other nine members of the team.

Tass: PILLAR: I'm turning the meeting over to these three. They'll be taking over the primary spots tomorrow in place of Empathion, Sharpshot, and myself. They have a solid plan, and they're more than ready. They've been tried and tested and earned their spots. This is the real deal.

Tass: He nods to them to continue as he sits.

Rev: "As you all know, Slaughter's location has been confirmed. We believe if we all strike together and strike fast, we can take him down once and for all. And what's better? We think he's working with the Scarlet Diamond Corporation. If we can prove it, we can finally take legal action against them. They won't be able to hide behind the red tape any longer."

Tass: He passes out blueprints and instructions to each member. Encumbrance steps up.

Teej: "Thanks to the intel from Sharpshot's contact, we have schematics of the warehouse. I'll go in first, scout the entry way, and report back. Don't move until I give the word."

Tass: Sindr steps up.

Jake: "Depending on Encumbrance's intel, I'll make a hole where we need it, First Line will cover the charge, and we'll take positions inside, based on the entry point."

Rev: "Pillar and I will engage Slaughter directly. If he gets a hand on any of the rest of you, he can literally rip you in half."

Teej: "Empathion and I will put everything into disorienting him, while Pillar and First Line slow him down. Divinity will keep our tankers healthy and energized."

Jake: "Sharpshot and I will hit him with everything we have from range. He's invulnerable, but he tires easily. We have to bring him down as fast as possible. If he still has the energy to run away, he'll do it."

Rev: "Everyone else is on crowd control. If Scarlet Diamond is only using mercs, they'll probably run. Let them. If they have stone golems, they won't back down. So it's up to you to keep them off of us."

Tass: Pillar steps up again.

Tass: PILLAR: We have surprise on our side. He's eluded us for years, but this time we've got him.

Tass: They all cheer and erupt. They congratulate the younger members on their plan, and they go to sleep as their normal selves for the last time.

The next morning, as they gear up, Sharpshot approaches Sindr. He's a broad, stocky man with a shaved head. He wears dark green tac gear and a high tech targeting monocle over his right eye. He carries a rifle that's taller than he is.

Tass: SHARPSHOT: Hey, uh ... I've got something for you.

Tass: He reaches into a belt pouch and produces a necklace. The silver chain is adorned with a green amulet in the shape of a stylized eye. The pupil is a crosshair.

Tass: SHARPSHOT: They call this the Emerald Eye. It's the necklace used by the very first alien superhero that came to the city.

Jake: "The Emerald Bolt! How did you get it?"

Tass: SHARPSHOT: Well, she gave it to Bombard when she retired. And Bombard gave it to me when he retired after training me, and I just never felt like I deserved it. So, you know, now it's -- it's going to you. I've never had a better trainee and ... Hell, you've more than earned it. I mean, you're barely a trainee anymore. You're so amazing at this. So congrats, kiddo. I hope you feel like you can wear this with pride.

Jake: She just gives him a big hug.

Tass: Aww. Empathion, a smallish man in brown monk's robes, approaches Encumbrance. He raises a hand to his temple, offering the younger hero the universal 'mind controller motion' salute.

Tass: EMPATHION: Make him shit their pants, my dude.

Teej: "I will." And then I'd give him a bunch of finger guns. And I mean a bunch. Like, I literally sprout arms all over the place. Like "Ayy, ayy, ayy, ayy, ayy ..."

Tass: Nice. Pillar approaches First Line and they shake hands, Schwarzenegger and Carl Weathers style.

Tass: PILLAR: (unison) We are the rocks against which the waves break.

Rev: (unison) "We are the rocks against which the waves break."

Tass: Pillar slaps him encouragingly on the back as they all head for the door.

Tass: PILLAR: This is the new class's first time leading. How do you feel?

Rev: "Well, I got a set of powers I didn't earn. I got very little training. And, well, leading my first mission with a bunch of people that I barely know. What could go wrong?" And he kind of gives him a sly grin, and pats him on the back.

Tass: Excellent. They sit around a table in the meeting room. Lady Tarot gets out her iconic deck of cards. The old crone looks to be over 100 years old. She's bent, ancient and weathered, though her eyes are still sharp and her movements are quick. She lays out her cards one at a time and begins flipping them over one by one, revealing that they're blank. Her forehead begins to glow purple, and an eye of energy snaps open. She glances over the cards and nods, seeing something that none of the rest of them seem to be able to see.

Tass: LADY TAROT: We are on a path of enlightenment. But it is a longer path than this one mission ahead of us. This is merely a beginning. The planting of seeds that will grow into a flourishing crop. What we find here will change us irrevocably.

Tass: She turns to Sindr, Encumbrance, and First Line.

Tass: LADY TAROT: Patience is key. You must not lose hope, even if you feel like you've lost what you are. Stay ready. Stay together. And you will find what you've lost.

Tass: Her third eye closes. They thank her for her time, and begin to leave. But to everyone's surprise, she starts following after them.

Tass: LADY TAROT: What? I said we, didn't I? Apparently fate wants me there as well. Pity, too. I'm missing my damn soaps for this ...

SFX: COMIC BOOK WHOOSH

Tass: An hour later, most of the team is hunkered down on a warehouse roof, looking out over a large empty lot at the neighboring warehouse. There are more than a dozen men near the entrance. They're dressed as factory workers, but the illusion is just completely ruined by the rigid patrols that they're walking, and the barely concealed weapons on their persons. Suddenly, the front doors burst open and Encumbrance runs out, trailed by four large humanoids made of glistening black stone, with large chunks of ruby dotting their forms. The guards raise their guns, and the golems charge at the hero.

Teej: "Go, go, go! Breach at the entrance!" And then I'm gonna just split into like, a dozen or so of me -- just going in every direction which way and that, to disorient the enemy.

Tass: And they do. They start shooting at every one of these kind of fake versions of you. The golems are swinging through just forms of you, and hitting nothing.

Rev: Front Line has set up before Encumbrance went inside, waiting to provide him with defense. And so he leaps off of the roof and activates his borderline power, and just pulls a ton of the cement and the stone from the building and brings it down like a tidal wave on top of the guards who are firing at all the various versions of Encumbrance.

Jake: And I fly in over his head and put both hands above my head, just holding like a cluster of little explosive blasts, and chuck them all at the wall in one spot to just melt a hole in it.

Tass: And it does. That wall just melts in a huge hole. From inside, you see a dozen or more of these obsidian and ruby golems just rushing out and charging towards the heroes coming in.

Rev: Front Line points both of his hands towards the ground and makes like a parting motion. The ground underneath them is cement and stone, and it parts. And then he slams it back together, catching all of their legs inside.

Jake: Sindr fires four shots at each golem in turn. Just three in a triangle to weaken the structure, and then a big one through the middle to blast a hole. And I'm just one, two, three, four. Next one. One, two, three, four.

Tass: The team hurries inside after all of these golems just split apart at Sindr's onslaught. Some of the guards burst into this hallway from the actual -- the middle of the warehouse. Encumbrance begins to cast an illusion, but finds it completely unnecessary. The guards take one look at the full entirety of The Hero Syndicate, and they just drop their guns and run out going, "Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope."

First Line and Pillar join up, and they begin checking through these office doors down this front hallway. The second door that they open reveals a storage room with stacks and stacks and stacks of large equipment crates with the Scarlet Diamond Corporation's logo stamped on the front.

Rev: "Beat Cop, get some shots of this."

Tass: One of the team steps up: the thickly muscled man in the Guardian City Police Department uniform, carrying a high tech riot club. He actually just pulls out a phone and starts taking photos. First Line and Pillar keep moving, and the team follows. First Line kicks open the fourth door, with Pillar at his side. Sindr, hovering and ready to shoot, and Encumbrance, poised for action. They stand there dumbfounded at what they see.

A hulking humanoid form is laying on a table. Sitting at the form's side is a bald man in his early 60s with a thin goatee. He wears advanced tech gauntlets on both hands and a sophisticated set of blue-lensed goggles. He glances up at the unexpected entry, curses under his breath, and clicks a button on his right gauntlet. With a soft, electric buzz, he disappears into thin air.

The form on the table is what caught the team's attention. It is unmistakably the man that they're here to catch: the man called Slaughter. He is huge. Around 9 feet tall. His shoulders alone are probably 5 feet across. Calling him muscular is just laughable, because he is the epitome of the human form -- just muscles and bulk and strength. The man that they believed to be unbreakable and nearly unstoppable is laying there on the table with IVs in his arm, lacerations crisscrossing his chest and sides. His head lolls over towards the open door. His eyes are shot through with red, and blood drips steadily from his nose. He looks terrified. He manages to croak one word:

Tass: SLAUGHTER: Run.

Tass: Lady Tarot pushes her way up through the crowd of her teammates and peeks into the room. She glances around with her third eye glowing wide open.

Tass: LADY TAROT: Oh. Shit.

Tass: A low hum begins to build around them in the building. A red light flashes. They all feel pain. And then there's nothing.

You all wake up to chaos. You're in a large, dark building, but it's only dark in that there aren't any actual lights on. But you can see well enough, because most of a wall in the distance is roaring with flame. Dazed and groggy, you sit up and discover that the large room is an emptied out warehouse. There are dozens of hospital beds lined up, possibly hundreds. In each, you see the same thing. There are other people sitting up and blinking, groggy and confused, and they're taking in the chaos around them.

There's a battle raging around you. Half the length of an outer wall of the building is just burning, faster and faster, lining the wall. There's a small force of mercenaries clashing with soldiers that seem to be made of living vines.

One figure stops near you. He has blue scaled skin, reptilian eyes, and a long whip-like tail. He takes a long look at all of you getting up from the beds and he curses. In a blur that only a speedster can make, he sprints off. Another man stands on a catwalk above you. He wears a pristine gray suit without its jacket, and a silver chain in his vest pocket. There's a gray bowler hat sitting tilted on his head. He grimaces at the scene and just winks out of sight.

You all go into reaction mode. You're heroes. You're ready to fight, to help, to assist in some way. But instantly, you feel it. You know that your abilities are gone. First Line, the call of the city just isn't there. The connection that you feel, that's always there for you? It's like it's buried under a mountain. Sindr, the energy that is so ingrained in you, literally a part of you? Feels like it's been chopped off -- as if you've lost a limb, somehow. Encumbrance, the magic that flowed through you that you could manifest with your will? It's just like an empty well.

You start to notice that the others around you look really weird. You're used to weird. There's lots of super heroes and villains and there are, you know, mutants and monsters and all sorts of things in this odd city. But everyone here looks like some kind of odd plant-like humanoid. There are people with leafy hair, bark-like skin, and so on. When you take stock of yourselves, what do we see?

Jake: Sindr has smooth, shiny, like almost plastic-y red skin now, instead of the purple, like the lavender skin she had before. And her hair is green, like a vibrant green -- and kind of plastic-y as well. Like, it hangs more in tendrils, now.

Teej: I've gone bald, somehow. And I've also turned mostly green, except for a few ... It looks almost like stripes across me, every once in a while, that are a little bit lighter green. And then there'd be a random little bump every once in a while, as well.

Rev: The skin on me that shows is orange, but the bulk of my body is tendrils of vines.

Tass: You're looking around in this chaos. You three were next to each other in your beds. So even though you look so odd, even through those new looks, you actually manage to recognize each other. You also find that one of your teammates, Tussler, who is now covered in small, round, green, dull little leaves. And Beat Cop, who has this rippled maroon skin, with a shock of this brownish-green leafy hair. They're both there with you, too.

Suddenly, sunlight spills in from the other side of the warehouse opposite the fire. Some loading bay doors have been opened and the crowd is heading that direction. And at the door, you see someone that you recognize. It's a tall man, just under 7 feet tall. He has mottled green skin, spiked leafy hair, and green eyes. He wears a sleeveless lab coat and carries a large futuristic rifle. It's Pillar of Justice's evil twin brother, a man that calls himself Dr. Despair -- but that for years everyone else has mockingly just called Despairagus, thanks to his plant-like skin.

He spots you. He narrows his eyes. And then he slips away.

SFX: HERO SALAD OUTRO