



The Trip to Germany

or

Invasion From Mars

Mission title:	<i>The Trip to Germany or Invasion From Mars</i>
Mission log:	1-06
Mission Johnson:	Herr Proteus
Mission reward:	
Participants:	Ricardo

Table of Contents

1-06: The Summoning	1
1-06: Arriving at Helgoland	1
1-06: An Interesting Presentation	3
1-06: Returning to Seattle	7



1-06: The Summoning

The ringtone was annoyingly upbeat and vapid. Song by some moronic tits-larger-than-her-brain simsense bimbo of the moment, it made you want to tap your feet, dance your heart out, and generally be exuberant. Ricardo decided then and there that he would change his ringtone at the first possible opportunity.

“Yes?” Ricardo’s voice was all business. “*Ich bin es,*” was the reply. It was a voice that Ricardo hadn’t expected to hear again so soon. Herr Proteus. Blinking rapidly for a few seconds, Ricardo switched to his native German. “*Ja?*” Slightly less business, slightly more warmth. He couldn’t help it. Even knowing what political views Herr Proteus held, Ricardo seemed to genuinely like the guy.

The phone conversation was fairly short and to the point. Ricardo’s presence in Germany was ... if not exactly *required*, then at the very least very *welcome*. Stopping just short of an order, Herr Proteus explained that it was in regard to the analysis of the samples that Dr. Farsight had collected, and that it would be extremely prudent of Ricardo to make all haste to Germany. And, more specifically, Helgoland.

With normal, German efficiency, Herr Proteus informed Ricardo that a bonded courier would be present at the airport. This courier would carry all the necessary permits and tickets for a short, two-day stay in Germany. And Herr Proteus would take it as a personal favor if Ricardo made all haste to the airport if at all possible.

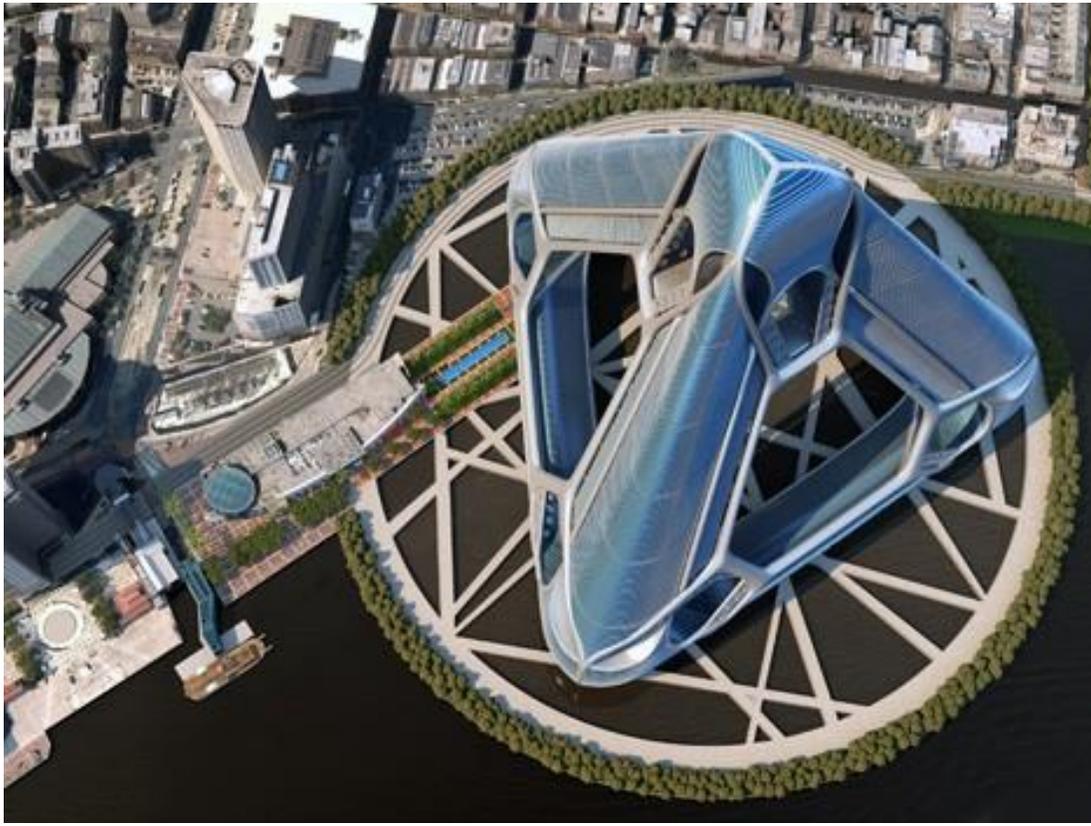
Even couched in niceties, the order was unmistakable. Make all haste to Germany, or rather – to Helgoland. Contact the courier for permits, and presumably an identity. And going through an airport meant no obvious weapons. Ricardo couldn’t help but suddenly feel like a very small fish in a very large and deep ocean.

1-06: Arriving at Helgoland

Apart from a slight delay at the airport both in Seattle and in Germany – even suborbitals sometimes had trouble, it seemed – Ricardo arrived at Helgoland with all due haste. Even his somewhat extensive cybernetic and bioware modifications had been waved through. The name was uncomfortably close to his real name. It had been a long time since he had traveled under anything even resembling his real birth name.

The arkoblock rose like a ziggurat out of the sea, and a modern ziggurat it indeed was. Ricardo had done his research, but cold numbers had done nothing to prepare him for the majestic view of Proteus AG’s home arkoblock rising out of the sea at Helgoland.

The arkoblock was about 500m on each side at the base, and didn’t jut all that high into the air. Relatively speaking. A significant portion was submerged, of course. Any doubt that Ricardo had had about Herr Proteus had long since disappeared. Herr Proteus was clearly in the employ of Proteus AG. With some trepidation, Ricardo boarded the hydrofoil bound for the arkoblock.



If Ricardo was completely honest with himself, he had trouble keeping his runner cool around this ostentatious display of wealth and power. Perhaps it was in poor taste, but he would have preferred it if the arcoblock was perhaps a little less shiny, a little less overwhelming.

The hydrofoil made quick work of the short trip over to the arcoblock. Ricardo disembarked, and was met by two unsmiling but courteous men in black suits. They could've been the long lost brothers of the men that had met them not so long ago when Ricardo's crew had delivered the two crates to them, perhaps a week ago. *It had only been a week. It felt so much longer.*

The clear, Perspex tube of the elevator came as a surprise to Ricardo, in a long succession of surprises. When the elevator followed the tube sub-surface, efficiently diving down into the murky water of the North Sea, Ricardo became somewhat concerned.

A slight pressure in his ears indicated that though sophisticated, even the Proteus AG arkoblock had to contend with physical realities, and that taking an elevator in a plastic tube down into the sea did carry some pressure differentials even for Proteus AG. Grimacing slightly, Ricardo discretely pinched the bridge of his nose and blew to equalize the pressures. His two unsmiling companions had no outward sign of noticing what he did – and didn't show any sign of discomfort either.



The elevator door opened. Herr Proteus was there, all smiles and greetings. Behind him, a cylindrical but otherwise featureless corridor went into the distance. Everything was gleaming white, chrome, and spotless.

While walking down the corridor, Herr Proteus made smalltalk, asking about how the trip on the sub-orbital had been, and whether it was his first time in Germany. Ricardo had the distinct impression that this was merely a formality – that any real answers he had given was already well known to Herr Proteus. After a couple of hundred meters, they arrived at a door – featureless but for a small hand print and retina scanner.

Herr Proteus splayed his hand against the retina scanner, and somewhat startling Ricardo noticed the prominent webbing on Herr Proteus' hand. A handprint and a retina scan later, the door opened with a slight whooshing noise and the slightest of changes in air pressure. The two unsmiling suited guards positioned themselves, one on each side of the door, and remained in the corridor. Ricardo and Herr Proteus advanced into the suite.

For a suite it was. A comfortable-looking lounge was positioned in front of an entirely transparent wall, looking into the ocean. Through some trick of light and technology, the water looked crystal blue – a far cry from the murky depths that the elevator had descended down into. A slight ridge in the floor showed where a transparent tube was connected directly to the outside water.

With some astonishment, Ricardo noticed what seemed to be a small airlock set into the tube side on the floor, leading directly into the water. Swimming around in the pocket of seemingly clean water outside the transparent wall were fish of several varieties, darting back and forth at random, glittering a bluish silver.

Herr Proteus indicated with a broad, sweeping gesture that Ricardo would be welcome to have a seat. Opening a hidden cabinet, Herr Proteus made two drinks with quick, practiced movements – two strong schnapps. With a flourish, he presented Ricardo with one of the schnapps, reserving the other for himself. “*For der Führer!*” Herr Proteus punctuated the toast with a sharp clack of his heels, and hammered the schnapps in one swift movement. Ricardo did the same. The schnapps burned down his throat. It was good – and strong.

Dimming the lights and changing the transparency of the wall, Herr Proteus used the now-white wall as a screen for a presentation. It started with a full screen image of a red planet, eerily recognizable as Mars. Herr Proteus started to speak in a sonorous voice, using the measured meter of a practiced presenter – a teacher, almost.

1-06: An Interesting Presentation

“Mars.



As far as the general public knows, there has never been a successful manned mission to Mars. The first manned mission to Mars was tried in December 2011 by NASA, a remnant organization from the then-United States of America. It crashed, killing five of eight astronauts.

NASA later reforms into Ares Space, and tries again with an Ares project called Project Cydonia in June 2042. This was ostensibly an unmanned but highly sophisticated multi-body probe that was to perform detailed scans of Mars. UCAS agents intercepted and apparently destroyed all data from the Cydonia Mars probes in the beginning of December, the same year.

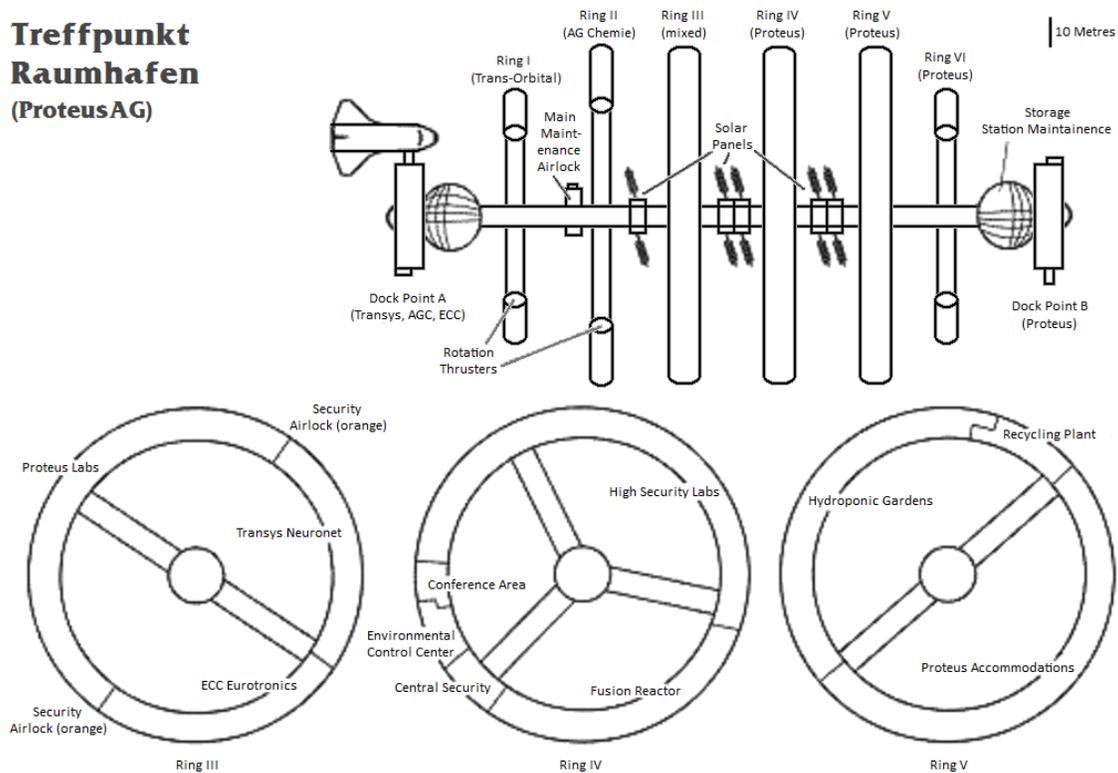
Currently, Yamatetsu helped by Russia and the Pacific Prosperity Group is assembling a multi-stage spacecraft for a manned mission to Mars within the next four to seven years. This will be, as far as the public knows, the first attempt at a manned mission to Mars in fifty years.

This is not quite the full truth of the matter.”

The images in the presentation had so far been fairly standard – footage from the crash, launch footage of the probe, and some animation interspersed with what seemed to be real footage of the spacecraft taking shape in Earth orbit.

“This ... is *Treffpunkt Raumhafen*.” The image abruptly changed, displaying an ungainly construction. A central spindle had six large wheels perpendicularly affixed, with a space dock at each end of the spindle. With very little for scale, it looked most of all like a child’s toy.

Treffpunkt Raumhafen (Proteus AG)





“Located at the L1 Lagrange point, Treffpunkt is scheduled for full operation in about the same time window as the Yamatetsu mission. This is common knowledge. What is not common knowledge, is that Proteus sent a manned mission to Mars some five years ago, assembling the spacecraft using Treffpunkt’s facilities. The spacecraft was called *Die Walkür*e, and its mission was to investigate the so-called Face of Cydonia.

The insertion into Mars orbit went according to plan, and *Die Walkür*e released its four-man lander according to plan. While the lander was descending, a high-energy projectile released from Phobos, one of Mars’ moons, and slammed into *Die Walkür*e. Direct contact was immediately lost. Only the so-called *Brotchen* communication satellites provided any indication of what happened next.

The lander landed, apparently unharmed. Presumably, the crew executed its mission. Some fourteen days later, the launch vehicle separated from the lander as per the schedule, and attempted to reach the hulk of *Die Walkür*e. A violent response to this came from Phobos, which immediately launched several projectiles on high-energy trajectories that took out the communication satellites and, presumably, anything else in near-Mars space.

Some four months ago, the observatory at Treffpunkt found that the hulk of *Die Walkür*e was inbound into cislunar space, apparently under some motile power. The ship itself was still unresponsive to commands sent from Treffpunkt.



This was obviously unacceptable. Launching several fusion devices for a controlled demolition and the subsequent vaporization of 98% of the hull, the matter was considered handled.



However, later events showed that this was probably a case of premature celebration. It soon became clear that two pieces of debris – one of a re-entry lifeboat of Die Walkürrie, the other a heavily shielded piece of reactor – impacted Seattle a few days later. The lifeboat hit Redmond, the reactor debris hit Puyallup.

We have reason to believe that the Redmond fragment, now codenamed *Invader One*, is a mostly biological, sapient entity that is trying to establish a beachhead in Seattle. Judging from the samples you have brought back, *Invader One* seems to excel at subverting local resources, altering them at a cellular level to make them more pliant to its needs.

We believe that *Invader One* can be classified as a low-aggression extraterrestrial entity, and we would like extended observation of *Invader One* before either entering into some sort of collaboration or execute an extermination mission.

As the situation in Seattle is quite tense for the moment, Proteus believes that in order to maintain exclusivity of the situation, it is prudent to utilize non-Proteus assets in order to contain or at least ameliorate any spread of *Invader One*.

Proteus does not currently have any information about the second fragment hitting Puyallup. Judging from activity at the site, there may or may not be a second infestation there.

So, Herr Ricardo... We wish for you to be our primary facilitator in Seattle when it comes to this situation. And I must make it quite clear that Proteus AG would like to maintain exclusivity in this matter for as long as possible.”

Ricardo was ... stunned, for lack of a better term. Up until 15 minutes ago, he didn't believe in little green men. Now, it seemed, some of them had attacked his current hometown in the form of Seattle. Spacecraft, Mars, global concerns. It was all quite a lot to take in.

As if by magic, another strong drink appeared in his hand, this time a stiff whiskey – a lot of whiskey, and a little bit of cold water. Herr Proteus made one for himself as well, not skimping on the whiskey there either. With an anticipatory grimace, Herr Proteus took a large swig of the potent beverage. Ricardo did the same. The burning sensation down his throat helped focus him a little.

“Proteus AG must, for obvious reasons, maintain complete deniability at all times. We are, however, prepared to arrange for a quite ... lenient credit line in this case, with a significant bonus if the containment is successful and exclusivity is maintained. For now, I trust that a credit line of up to 250 000 nuyen will be sufficient. Based on the progress and any results of the project, that credit line can and will be extended as necessary.”

Herr Proteus paused, and took another hefty swig of the whiskey. Unabashed, he continued. “As I mentioned, containment and exclusivity are paramount. Securing samples is an important, but ultimately secondary goal. Proteus AG will deny any liability and any accusations of being



complicit in any action that may be taken, of course. And ...” he looked directly at Ricardo at this, “Proteus will not hesitate to execute massive retaliation if Proteus so sees fit.”

1-06: Returning to Seattle

The whiskey tumbler was empty, somehow. Ricardo had some vague recollection of getting it refilled repeatedly, while discussing a plan with Herr Proteus. Ultimately, he had rather free reins to formulating a plan. Yet he couldn't shake the feeling of being in over his head. And severely so, too.

Sometime during the presentation, he had become vaguely aware of a man-shaped being hovering in the tube, down in the water. No bubbles had marked the passing of that shadowy figure. Ricardo had the distinct feeling of being probed.

Herr Proteus ended the meeting. Showing a certified cred stick into Ricardo's hand, he ushered him out. The two brothers grim were still waiting outside, seemingly in the same position as they had taken when he entered the suite several hours ago.

The suborbital flight back to Seattle was but a background blur to Ricardo. He slept fitfully on the flight, dreaming of large derelicts floating in space. He became aware of a mechanical skittering, like huge, metal spider legs tik-tik-ing on plastic. It seemed to go forever. Ricardo awoke with a start as the suborbital flight was about to touch down in Seattle. Rest would have to wait. He had more important things to do.