



Yeah Science!

or

Looking for Brains in All the Wrong Places

Mission title:	<u>Yeah Science!</u> or <u>Looking for Brains in All the Wrong Places</u>
Mission log:	1-03, 1-04
Mission Johnson:	Self-motivated / <u>Herr Schmidt (Herr P)</u>
Mission reward, first part:	2 karma
Mission reward, second part:	4,000 nuyen (expenses pool), 2 karma
Participants, first part:	Cogwhistle, Dr. Farsight, Jinx, Schneider, Vince
Participants, second part:	Cogwhistle, Dr. Farsight, Jinx, Ricardo, Vince

Table of Contents

1-03: Setup	1
1-03: Preliminary analysis	2
1-03: Astral shenanigans, and a mystery visitor is revealed	4
1-03: The address in the Redmond Barrens.....	7
1-04: Meeting old friends, thinking about Boston.....	11
1-04: Scientifically speaking, this is both weird and gross.....	13
1-04: Driving Miss Daisy – with a helping of ambush	15
1-04: The gang is back together	17
1-04: A song and a proposal.....	20
1-04: The conflict with the floor manager	24

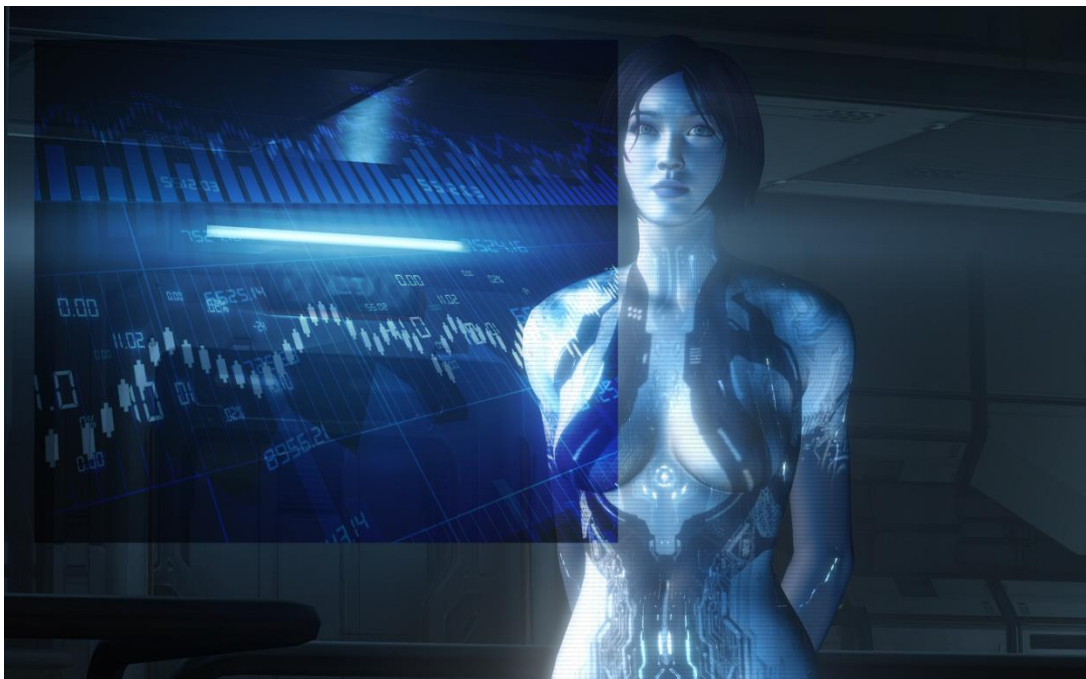


1-03: Setup

It's early afternoon on February 22nd, 2058, Seattle. It is a Friday. So far, the runners congregate at Dirty Nelly's again, their sort of unofficial 'biz' place. If this trend continues, it is possible that they will need to ask someone for permission to do this. The proprietor of the bar, for one. So far, however, Areinh is nowhere to be seen. Jinx positions herself behind the taps, and immediately starts fiddling with her bag, rolling out a leather rollup of tools and whistling happily to herself with a mad glint in her eye.



The only patron in the bar is the same older, vaguely Irish gentleman being depressed and drunk in his usual corner from yesterday. He doesn't seem to take much notice of anyone or anything, and is nursing a drink and a tall glass of water. Every now and again he murmurs to himself, "I fraggin' *told* him, but did he listen? Did he ever. *Amadán.*"





On the muted trid, some talking heads are discussing the latest news from Seattle, interspersed with infographics and animations and the ever ubiquitous stock trends. A scantily clad and chesty avatar is pointing out the miniscule variations since yesterday in a sultry way, trying to make the stock market ooze of sex. She's failing at that.

A small explosion, attributed to a gas leak, hurt one dockworker early this morning while some cargo was being transferred on the docks. Stuff blows up, people get hurt, and sometimes they die. Business as usual, chummer.

As if on some unspoken cue, Vince walks into the bar closely followed by Cogwhistle, Dr. Farsight, and Schneider. By now, Jinx is standing on the bar desk itself, fiddling with the light fixtures above the bar. It seems that she's replacing the bulbs with new bulbs – which is odd, given that all the fixtures seem to be working normally.

Schneider moseys up to the bar, giving a curious look at the array of tools and devices spread over the bar. She whistles softly after inspecting a couple of the smaller devices on the table, and chuckles to herself. Jinx quickly finishes up, and lithely jumps down from the bar.

“Mornin’.” The troll’s gravelly yet still cultured voice is at odds with the trid stereotype of the incredibly stupid troll. His alert gaze further belies that stereotype. “Can we use the back room?” Jinx walks over, opens the room, and gives a quick look inside. “Yeah, why not? I have no idea where Areinh is, but I’m sure it’s no problem.”

The runners quickly congregate in the back room. Jinx draws a Murphy for the guy at the corner table – on the house. He is seemingly oblivious as she places the pint in front of him. “Complements of the house, sir.” “*Go raibh maith agat.*” Somewhat nonplussed, she joins the rest in the back room.

1-03: Preliminary analysis

Quickly disassembling the device again, they inspect it in detail. Everyone pitches in with their opinion or skill. After a while, there's several things that seem reasonable.

It is clear that the device wasn't meant to be opened.

- The polymer clamshell was welded together with heat.
- All components are seemingly soldered together.
- The battery was not accessible through the exterior of the device, though the device has a standard charging port together with standard I/O ports for streaming content.

It is clear that the device shouldn't work the way it is currently put together.

- Though all the peripheral components (screen, polymer shell, battery and so on) seem to be fairly standard, the motherboard is a *brainboard* – it seems that all functions actually *are* wired to the coronal section of brain that is present in its transparent polymer sleeve, floating in its blue gunk.



- The slice, a coronal section of brain, isn't alive, but isn't quite dead either. It is wired to the battery and seems to be in fair order for something that should not be.

It is clear that the device seems to be a fully-fledged portable secretary.

- Its shape and functionality indicates a touch screen-based portable secretary – though slightly smaller and lighter than most of the models currently available for a reasonable amount of nuyen.
- It seems to have a wifi card for short range integration with various networks, but some of the wires connecting the wifi card to the ... brainboard, so to speak, bypass the wifi card entirely and goes directly to the antenna integrated in the polymer shell.

Whoever made this didn't want to be tracked.

- Even though components seem to be somewhat standard, there's no serial numbers, model numbers or production markers anywhere on or in the device, even on the components that were hidden from view inside the shell.
- Even down to the components making up the cards inside themselves, there's nothing visible (at least using the equipment available for the runners).

And lastly, even though the runners between them are at the very least conversant with most general kinds of bioware, cyberware, electronics, biotech, medicine and pharmaceuticals, it doesn't make sense that there's just a *slice* of brain in there – a genetically engineered or modified *whole* brain is necessary for this to work, but this is just some mad slice of some higher primate's brain!

There's no frontal lobes, no loci of activity left in the brain slice to wire to, and there doesn't seem to be any neural interface – just an electrode, shoved through the plastic envelope and into the slice of brain. Surely if one were to make a neural interface to something, one would need a whole *system* to work with, not just a *slice*?

Frustrated, Jinx blurts out what they all seem to be thinking – “but that doesn't make any fragging sense!” Calmly, dr Farsight says that this leaves them no other option; they need to do destructive testing on the device. He pulls out his own pocket secretary, goes over to a corner slightly away from the others, and dials a number.

“Allie? Yeah, I need a favor. I need to get access to your lab for a few hours. MMMmmhhmmm. Yes. No, I promise not to do that. That was just once, and nobody died. I know Gary was purple for a week, but that was his own fault. Besides, it was hilarious. Yeah, I know. Nah, it's just some samples I need to run through the sequencer – and access to the imagers and databases would be nice too. Three of us. Me included. No guns. Yeah, I can see that. I'll make sure we're presentable. Thanks man. You're the best. See you, Allie.”

Snapping his pocket secretary shut, dr Farsight announces to the rest – “I've got an in. I've got access to a full-fledged pharmaceutical lab, and I can take two others with me. This is a



chummer of mine, so we need to be like, legal and subtle. So I think I'll prefer that Ricardo and Cogwhistle accompanies me to the lab if they wish. I suspect that doing the analysis can destroy the device, just to be clear." The group nods assent. Jinx pipes up that she would like to just *power on* the device first – just to see what happens.

Stunned silence fills the room. Why not just turn it on, indeed. Cogwhistle breaks the moment. "That's a good idea. I'll be astrally projecting from the other room though, to see what happens." With no further comment, the dwarf walks out of the room and flops bonelessly on the faux-leather couch out in the main room. Vince follows him out of the room.

1-03: Astral shenanigans, and a mystery visitor is revealed

Cogwhistle detaches his spirit from the meat. As always, he wonders about what form he takes when he's astral – he knows it is his idealized self-image, but he's never actually *seen* it himself. Though he suspects that he's taller in the astral than he is in meat world, he doesn't know - mirrors don't work on the astral. He glances around. The older guy is still in his corner, but now nursing the beer that Jinx brought him earlier. There's no one else here, except Vince that is standing around, watching Cogwhistle's now vacant body protectively. Should be safe enough.

The dwarf's astral projection goes to the closed door to the back room and *pushes* through. Pushing through the door feels like cobwebs brushing his face. He enters the room just as Jinx finishes putting the device together again. Though Cogwhistle feels that there's too much definition on that thing – too many details, considering that it is a manufactured object – it is still cold and dead to his astral eyes.

If he squints, then maybe there's a weak, gray haze around it... his train of thought is interrupted by an ubiquitous sound – the boot sound of a pocket secretary. Cogwhistle's eyes widen. Sound? Generated by an electronic device? On the astral plane? *Impossible*.

Jinx watches the boot sequence of the pocket secretary. Though the graphical interface is unfamiliar and in an unnamed operating system, it seems ordinary enough. The boot image was a prominent Greek letter – Ψ . Contacts, calls, wifi connections – most of the options expected from a pocket secretary, an advanced handheld computing device, is present on the menu.

Cogwhistle feels a growing unease. Not only did he hear the boot sound, he can also see the icons on the display of the device. Slightly blurry and only in a sort of greyish white, but he shouldn't be able to see anything on the display at all! Gradually, he becomes aware of a screeching noise on the edge of his perception. It sounds [like... like a...](#) he snaps back to his body. Instantly, he's slammed with a powerful sense of vertigo and nausea. Cogwhistle starts crawling towards the men's room, suddenly bereft of his feet and retching violently. "Destroy ... turn off... that *thing*...", he manages to shout to Vince while crawling and between retching fits.

Jinx is puttering with the system, trying to find any named apps or pre-loaded software that can help identify the maker of the system when Vince slams open the door and comes rushing in,



his bo stick held with deadly purpose. Surprised, Jinx reflexively swipes the device away as the butt of the stick comes whistling down on the table where the device recently sat. Cradling the device protectively, she shouts at Vince, “What?” “Mage said break the thing – turn it off!”, Vince shouts back, temporarily reverting to a more primal Vince.

Jinx deftly snaps open the clamshell and sharply yanks the battery off its leads. The device goes dead the moment it loses power. “There! Happy?” Vince says something, and turns to go outside again, seemingly disgusted with the entire thing. The magically enhanced senses of Jinx picks up the acrid stench from the main room – Cogwhistle’s Technicolor yawn, stretched out like some strange snail’s track towards the men’s room.

Sighing, she puts the now disassembled device on the table, and goes to the supply closet, pulling out a bucket and some deodorizing cleaning spray. A mop swiftly follows. This is, after all, an Irish pub – the Irish are by some, and not completely without reason, considered professional alcoholics. These things happen. Though cleaning the mess isn’t pleasant, the supplies are top notch for this work.

Dr. Farsight scoops up the parts, including the battery, and carefully bags them in separate Ziploc bags before stashing it in his pack. Before he packs away the bagged slice, he looks at it closer. It seems that some deterioration has set in on the coronal slice already. With a thoughtful frown, he double-bags the brainboard and carefully puts it in his bag. Things were taking a turn for the strange indeed.

Schneider goes out of the back room, and looks at the older man in the corner. A memory nags at her, as if the slag’s someone he knew or has known of. The older man seems to be studiously ignoring the commotion, unfazed by the sight of a Troll moving at inhuman speeds and a violently retching dwarf mage crawling to the men’s room.

Deciding that discretion may be the better part of valor, Schneider helps herself to a top-shelf whiskey behind the bar. *Tullamore Dew 12 Year Old Special Reserve*. That should suffice. Particularly now that Tír na nÓg has reduced the volume of exports.

Paying two hundred nuyen for the bottle seems excessive, but she shrugs and slots her credstick, completing the transaction. Fortune favors the bold, perhaps, but Schneider prefers not to trust Fortune. She’s fickle. Mutual respect is a much better basis for a favor.

Schneider plonks down the expensive bottle of bona fide Irish whiskey, together with a snifter, in front of the older man. “Complements of the management”, she says, while searching for a sense of acknowledgement from the older man.

The older man looks at the bottle, apparently weighing his options for a few seconds, then fixes a steely-gray look on the young, attractive woman in front of him. After a few tense seconds, the older man nods, then studiously ignores Schneider again.



“Transaction completed, I guess.” Schneider walks off again, somewhat unnerved by the unexpected searching gaze from the older man which she thought was drunk. “Not *that* drunk, I guess”, she muses. And then, as if a bolt of lightning from a clear sky, she remembers where she’s seen the older man before.

The older man is the ostensibly retired top hit man of the Irish Mafia in Seattle. Big in the 2040s under the handle “Cu Dog”, he’s now somewhat better known by his ‘real’ name, Sean Coll. Somewhat flustered, Schneider decides to keep her discovery for herself.



(Image shamelessly plundered from the rich booty of the Internet)
Sean “Cu Dog” Coll

For those with an enhanced olfactory sense, the smell of the Tullamore whiskey is delicious, carrying with it a promise of peat and a pleasant burning sensation. For those without, only the appreciative smile from the older man in the corner as he sips a generous drink from his free bottle of spirits betrays that his melancholy spirit has for the moment been chased away by stronger stuff in the bottle. With a gesture to the table, the table starts piping the sound feed from the trid as the old man changes the channel to the Irish Heritage Channel.



Waiting for Friday night to officially start, so that Dr. Farsight's contact could get one part of the group into the pharmaceutical lab, it is clear that the mood has changed. Cogwhistle, somewhat recovered from his ordeal, refuses to discuss what he saw or heard that made him react so violently and suddenly.

Schneider, Vince, and Jinx, are bored out of their tiny little heads (well, in the case of Vince, a rather large, horned head – but still, he's bored). Vince produces the address in the Redmond Barrens – it looks suspiciously like a printout of a photograph taken of the actual crate, with the actual address. Offering no explanation, Vince just puts the printout on the table, and puts a heavy finger on the picture, pinning it to the table. The table creaks in protest to this abuse. The augmented troll makes no notice of this.

"We should go there." Vince's flat voice brooks no discussion. Jinx and Schneider nods assent. Jinx pipes up, "but only for scouting!" Vince nods. "Scouting sounds good. It always pays to be prepared." "And splitting up for this is good – we can cover more ground that way!" Jinx' exclamation elicits a slight facepalm from Cogwhistle. "What? What did I say?"

Nevertheless, they decide to split up, with one group going downtown to visit the lab of Dr. Farsight's contact – after picking up some gear, of course. The other group decides to gather some gear as well, and then take the bus as far as it goes. Not surprisingly, that is only to the edge of the Redmond Barrens, and to the edge *only*.

Lots of things are busted in Redmond, and one of them is the GridLink™ system that the bus depends on to find its way. No driver in his right mind would drive into any of the two Barrens without full riot gear and an armored bus. And even then, preferably with remote control.

Jinx has the shortest way to go in order to retrieve her gear – most of it is right here, and the rest's just across the road. Schneider's ready in short order, too. Vince is away for half an hour, and returns apparently dressed in his normal gear, with his bo stick in his hand – and with a military-style backpack on his back. The urban camouflage seems to fit the large troll, though the backpack is dangerously approaching fanny-pack territory for Vince – it doesn't really look proportional to his body.

1-03: The address in the Redmond Barrens

Three figures step off a bus on a stop close to the [Redmond Barrens](#). It's two fit girls and a large, hulking troll. Jinx, Schneider and Vince stand in silence as the automatic bus closes its doors and pulls out into traffic again. The wan daylight shows that it's not long before darkness sets. If anyone thinks it is foolhardy to be outside in the Redmond Barrens, in unknown territory, potentially while dark, they keep quiet.

Some graffiti sprayed on the bus stop sullenly proclaims that "Eog is back!" More prominently, though, is the flaming Jack O' Lantern stenciled on a brick wall a few dozens of meters further into Redmond. This is *Halloweeners* territory.



A Halloweeners boss

(Image blatantly ripped from <http://www.brycecook.com>)

Vince shrugs, adjusts his various straps and buckles, hefts his stick, and starts walking into the lawless, gang-infested area. Jinx and Schneider follow closely on his heels. For Vince, this is like a trip down memory lane. For the other two, it's a trip into an active combat zone. Both are right.

Miraculously, after an hour's walk (and the sun getting correspondingly lower on the horizon), they reach their destination unmolested. Whether the gangs are having an off day, or whether it is their formidable appearance that has scared away any potential muggers isn't clear. Nevertheless, they have found the address.

It's a large, brick building near a still-working power station. The brick building seems to have been a factory of some kind, but has fallen into some disrepair. One of its smoke stacks have been torn down at some point, leaving a gaping hole into the factory itself.

Despite this, the building seems to be in fairly good repair – its windows mostly whole, its three-meter brick wall almost pristine in its distinct lack of graffiti or gang signs. An older, white Japanese car is parked close to the brick wall surrounding the factory. The car is seemingly in good working order, and seems quite incongruous given the surrounding area.



There's no one around – and they haven't really noticed any curious eyes on them from windows for a kilometer or so either. The quiet is almost eerie – not even the sound of some distant gunshots serve to break up the feeling of isolation – no, *desolation*. They observe from a distance for quite some time, seeing no sign of activity. They decide to get a closer look.



While Jinx and Vince is carefully observing the windows of the seemingly abandoned factory, Schneider is stealthily creeping towards the car. Careful not to touch anything on the car, she checks out the car thoroughly. It's an older car with an ethanol engine, but it is in remarkably good repair. Particularly so considering where it is parked. It's still got all its wheels, and if one had the key one could probably just start it up and drive off.

"I don't know who owns this car," whispers Schneider to the others over the comm. "But if they have enough pull to be able to park a car in Redmond without it being stolen or worse, I don't really want to meet them if I can help that." Schneider goes towards the fallen smoke stack right next to the solid gate in the brick wall.

Vince and Jinx meet up with Schneider at the gate. Looking past the rubble of the broken down section, the insides of the factory are still obscured. With inhuman, *magical* grace, Schneider vaults on top of the fallen stack and lithely runs to the lower roof. Being careful not to silhouette herself towards the window, she takes a peek inside. Her magically augmented senses quickly pierce the dank shadows of the interior.



The main factory floor is a huge space, mostly fallen into disrepair. There's no obvious sign of activity here at all. With a whispered message over the comm, Vince and Jinx get the all clear. Opting out of trying to open the door, Vince just expedites things by lifting Jinx on top of the brick wall, and then jumping over himself. His augmented strength and speed easily tops the three meters of brick wall.

Jinx looks at the door lock. It's a mechanical, high-quality door lock set into a metal door – probably a fire door. The door looks fairly recent – it's still shiny, and the paint's not chipped yet. Who in this day and age uses mechanical locks? She starts looking through her tools in order to come up with something. Her demolitions kit offers a solution, if she only could jury rig some kind of door breaching charge...

Vince firmly but gently pushes her to the side of the door. He motions for her to step back a little bit further. With his augmented strength, he digs his hands into the brickwork on either side of the frame. Whoever installed this door didn't think of reinforcing the surrounding brickwork to any significant degree.

With a mighty heave, Vince pops the entire door, frame and all, out of its place. He gently puts the two hundred kilo door to one side of the gaping hole in the brickwork. With an apologetic shrug and a toothy grin, he steps into the hole. Gingerly, Jinx follows suit. Schneider continues with her overwatch from her vantage point.

Carefully searching the main factory floor, they find that there are tracks on the floor here. Too scuffed to see whether they're human or animal, they're nevertheless quite large. Something was dragged through here at one time too – something rectangular. One of the circular holes in



the floor is the top of an uncovered tank filled with murky, oily water. The other is covered in debris – but apparently, carefully stacked debris.

Jinx goes closer, and verifies that there's heat rising up from the iron grillwork apparently haphazardly covering the top of the empty tank with her thermographic vision. Going closer, she gingerly peeks down into the tank. It's quite dark, and there's some mud on the tank floor with further tracks in them. The tank's just about as wide as it is deep, so it isn't that deep.

Careful not to disturb anything, Vince and Jinx checks out the rest of the building. Again, apart from the somewhat disheveled factory floor, it is in remarkably good repair. There's no sign of the owner of the car. And there's nothing but some random, small debris in the other offices and side rooms to the factory floor – it is as if everything of any size was dragged to the factory floor and used to cover up the top of the empty tank.

After an hour or so, Schneider is thoroughly bored with sitting on top of the lower roof – but Jinx and Vince are done searching the building. Vince gets a text message. It's Dr. Farsight. Ricardo, Cogwhistle and him are approaching Redmond right now, having completed the analysis of the device. The carefully tabulated results are attached as a rather large media attachment. Vince doesn't open it right now. The Barrens isn't a good place to sit down for a good read, no matter how weird the results.

Jinx and Vince starts to carefully and stealthily stack the debris covering the empty tank to one side. Progress is slow, but after another hour, it is almost completely dark outside – but the tank is almost completely uncovered. Jinx drops down and hangs over the edge, secured by Vince by her ankles. Feeling with her fingers, she discovers a seam in the empty tank – it's a concealed door cut out in the side of the tank, almost the entire way to the top.

Excited, she motions for Vince to pull her up of the tank. He does so, and gently sets her down at the side of the tank. She outlines her discovery, and they're debating what to do. A tremendous explosion close by is quickly followed by some sporadic gunfire. "It's the guys! The cab was just blown up by some clown with a LAW, and they're fighting with someone now!" Schneider's report sounds almost impossible, but Vince and Jinx don't hesitate.

Deciding that the time for stealth is long past, they start running towards the now sooty column of smoke rising a few blocks away. One is magically augmented, the other is technologically augmented. They're both inhumanly fast. And they're both too late for the party.

1-04: Meeting old friends, thinking about Boston

A few hours earlier, Cogwhistle, Ricardo, and Dr. Farsight gets into a cab and goes downtown to meet dr. Alexandros – Allie to friends. The sign on the side of the building proudly proclaims *Bioleve*, a wholly owned subsidiary of [Cross Applied Technologies](#).



Dr. Farsight gets out of the cab first, and approaches an older man in a lab coat that is standing inside Bioleve's lobby, apparently waiting anxiously. The older man buzzes him inside the otherwise deserted lobby. "I heard you quit Boston," the older man says. "Yeah," answers Dr. Farsight. "The climate didn't agree with me." "Yet here you are, and here we are," says the older man. Dr. Farsight smiles broadly, and embraces the older man. "Good to see you again!"

Dr. Farsight lets go, and grandiosely gestures toward the dwarf and the human waiting unobtrusively outside Bioleve's lobby. "Unfortunately, this is biz and these are my current associates. I hope we can catch up later." The older man relaxes, and smiles – relief evident in meeting the associates, and that they don't seem inhuman at all. Silly trid shows about shadowrunners tend to give people all the wrong ideas. And some right, too, but they're few and far between. The older man buzzes the dwarf and the human inside Bioleve's lobby.

Dr. Alexandros' AR glasses glitter in their frame, firmly planted on his nose. Some of the pensiveness returns, but the older man seems to shrug it off. He reaches behind the security desk inside the lobby, and takes out three access cards. "You have access to the entire lab. If everything's ok when I return tomorrow morning, the security footage of tonight will be deleted on Monday. You will not get access to anything but the lab, and I hope none of you will try forcing access on this." He looks apologetically at Dr. Farsight. "Best I could do on such short notice." Dr. Farsight shrugs. "It's fine, and much more than I expected. Thank you again."



Dr. Alexandros, Bioleve (CATCo)
(Image blatantly ripped from concept art for Gears of War 3)



Smiling from ear to ear, Dr. Farsight produces a wine bottle. “A little appreciation in addition to what we talked about earlier. It’s Friday night, and who can get too much plonk? I seem to remember that red wine was your favorite, back in the day.”

Dr. Alexandros startles, then relaxes and laughs a little. “Yes, you’re quite right, red wine’s my favorite. Is that for me? That’s too much...” Over his friend’s polite protests, Dr. Farsight presses the bottle into dr. Alexandros’ hands. “Again, you’ve earned it – have a drink on me tonight, and I’ll call you later.”

After dr. Alexandros has left the building, dr. Farsight is all business. In the elevator to the laboratory in the basement, he explains the precautions needed in order to not contaminate the results accidentally. Both Ricardo and Cogwhistle briefly regret coming with Dr. Farsight. Neither is an experienced lab monkey, and this seems much more tedious than they imagined. It seems that the medical trid shows aren’t very accurate when it comes to real science, either.

The elevator doors glide open with their customary pling. Dr. Farsight rubs his hands eagerly. *Science!* Ricardo and Cogwhistle both light up when they see the relaxation lounge for the lab, directly next to the lab – only segregated by a Perspex airlock and an UV quick decon. *Coffee!* And cookies! Each to his own. Cogwhistle goes through scrubbing, and carefully cleans the parts of the device in order to minimize cross contamination.

1-04: Scientifically speaking, this is both weird and gross

Dr. Farsight works for a few hours. He gets samples from all the major components of the device, as well as samples from the brain slice and the weird, blue gel that the brain slice is suspended in. He works carefully, trying to minimize the damage to the components.

Nevertheless, he can see that the brain slice turns more gray by the minute. It seems that his hunch is right – the device won’t turn on after this, he suspects. It is odd that disconnecting the battery should cause this much damage. He runs the spectrometer instrumentation on his samples, cross referencing with the extensive library available on the terminals in the lab. The results are puzzling, to say the least.

In the meantime, Ricardo decides that a good dinner is much more interesting than watching Dr. Farsight putter about in the lab like a mad scientist. There’s not much sense in the reams of data that scroll on the various screens in the lab, nor in the 3D protein models that pop up every now and then. Cogwhistle is up for it as well. The nausea from earlier seems to be replaced by a ravenous hunger, and coffee and raiding leftover chocolate chip cookies doesn’t seem to do much to sate that hunger.

Dropping off their access badges, they leave a text message to Dr. Farsight. “Gone to dinner, call us when you’re done. Ricardo and Cogwhistle.” Dr. Farsight hardly notices anything. He’s tabulating his findings, and they’re *interesting* to say the least.



The brain slice is from a human Caucasian female between 25 – 40 years of age. There's traces of substance abuse in the gross brain structure visible, mostly metamphetamines and psychedelics. Other than the substance abuse, there is no particular genetic disease or syndrome indicated by the test results.

It is unlikely that the female was a dwarf, troll or ork, but might be an elf – the results on this are somewhat inconclusive, and DNA won't necessarily help if the person underwent goblinization in 2011 (which is in the upper range of the age estimate of the subject).

The blue liquid seems to be both a preservative and a means of increasing the conductivity of the brain. It does not correspond to any known compound or solution available on the market today, and seems to contain some exotic compounds.

One of the exotic compounds is a neurotoxin. It seems to be a compound similar to tetraethylammonium – a motor nerve inhibitor, and therefore a paralytic agent. This neurotoxin seems from its structure to be of biological origin, but there's no organism on file that produces the neurotoxin. And most strange of all – it seems to be a left-oriented molecule.

One of the other exotic compounds present in the blue liquid is an artificial sweetener – acesulfame k. Dr. Farsight ponders this. Diet soda? That doesn't make much sense at all.

The polymer used in the envelope is a common ETFE plastic. The polymer used in the device's outer casing is similarly unremarkable. Even under high magnification, UV light, IR light, ultrasound, or X-ray there's no manufacturer's mark, serial number, or other distinct markings visible on any of the components.

Dr. Farsight sends the information together with a complete DNA sequencing of the human subject as well as the structure of the exotic compounds he found to his own computer system. He then carefully wipes down and resets all of the equipment he has used – as well as sending a small gratuity to his friend for the use of various chemicals and so on. Friends don't leave friends hanging, after all. He quickly jots down a thank you-note and sends it to his friend's private inbox. No reason to involve Bioleve more than they already are.

A slight twinge of annoyance crosses Dr. Farsight's face when he realizes that his companions left some time ago. At least they didn't make too much of a mess in the lounge, and they did leave the access cards on the security counter before buzzing themselves out. He reads the note, and chuckles ruefully. A food run? Seriously? Oh well.

Actually, something warm to eat wouldn't be half bad. He dumps the security tags into the incinerator at the security desk, then buzzes himself out in the crisp Seattle night. It's still cold, but not *too* cold. It got dark a couple of hours ago, and the Seattle night is alive with the bustle and noise of its night shift, both legitimate and criminal. Dr. Farsight sends a message to his



companions. It's done. The results don't make much sense, but it's done. He quickly gets a return message stating where Ricardo and Cogwhistle are. They're coming to pick him up.

He goes down to a nearby hot soy dog stand, and eats something greasy, warm and delicious while he waits. It doesn't take long, and he's got his gear with him already. It might be a long night yet. He meets up with the other two, and in their manned cab they set a course for the Barrens.

1-04: Driving Miss Daisy - with a helping of ambush

The cab driver stops at the edge of Redmond. "This is as far as I go, I'm afraid. If I go any further, I fear something bad will happen. It's dark already too, and I really don't want to be here any longer than I have to."

Despite Ricardo's protests and finagling, the cab driver is adamant. His three kids are likely to be fatherless if he drives into Redmond at night in a cab, and he doesn't particularly like the prospect of being dead either.

Cogwhistle concentrates, and completely rolls the mind of the cab driver. "You *will* take us to the address in Redmond." Like an automaton, the cab driver nods assent, starts the car, and starts driving the cab into Redmond. It is as if the flaming, grinning jack-o-lantern graffiti watches them go.



After a while, both Dr. Farsight and Ricardo relax. So far, so good. Cogwhistle still maintains the mind control spell, feeling a slight headache coming on. It's even been a while since they saw a



flaming pumpkin sprayed on the wall. In the almost full dark, Ricardo notices a hideous clown face on a brick wall. He's about to point that out to Dr. Farsight, when the 66 cm armor piercing rocket from a LAW slams down into the engine bay of the cab and detonates in a deafening explosion.

The cab driver is instantly killed. The mangled cab slams into a nearby, dilapidated fence, and comes to a juddering halt. Ricardo releases his seat belt, pops open the passenger door on his side, and crawls out. Concussed from the crash, he focuses on the incongruous trio bearing down on him – two in the front, one further back. They're dressed like grotesque clowns. Ricardo pulls his weapon, and takes a snapshot at the first clown. It grazes the clown, but if the clown even notices it isn't clear. He does not slow down in the least.

The first one, albeit morbidly obese, runs faster than a greased pig. While making oink oink noises, and wielding a scruffy-looking pie in one hand, seemingly made out of shaving foam. The second one, slightly further back, is dressed like a demented ringmaster while brandishing a huge revolver with an extremely long barrel – easily 60 cm long.

The third, at the back, is dressed like a somewhat normal clown with an organ-grinding robot monkey on his shoulder with a small automatic weapon peeking out of the organ. The third clown ditches the now expended LAW launcher, picks his way down from his vantage point, and starts rushing towards the wrecked cab as well. Wild sprays of small caliber, fully automatic fire from the organ-grinding robot monkey punctuate his running as he advances towards the twisted wreckage of the cab.

The fat clown throws the "pie" in the general vicinity of the car. The incendiary foam ignites when it strikes the ruin of the car, and sickly yellow flames starts licking the engine bay. This car runs on ethanol. It is likely just a matter of time before something ... unfortunate ... catches fire.

Calm and collected, Dr. Farsight gets out of the car. He pops open his recurve bow, and nocks an arrow from his extensive quiver. It has white fletching. He aims at the screaming white-faced blob that is running towards him. The white phosphorus-tipped arrow embeds itself deeply in the chest of the murderous clown. He drops like a stone. A *large* stone. With a pop and a fizz, the white phosphorus ignites the body, and the shaft starts burning like the strangest birthday candle on a grotesque birthday cake.

The ringmaster clown stops, and giggling like a little school girl makes a little dance while applauding the spectacle. Even the remaining clown with the murderous organ-grinding robot monkey shouts a guttural "bravo!" while still advancing menacingly towards the crash site.

Cogwhistle looks out of the shattered windscreen, blood from a superficial scalp wound streaming down his face. His brow furrows in concentration. Eldritch energies ground through the ringmaster's aura, staggering him slightly.



The ringmaster stops giggling, and brings up his oversize revolver deliberately. The shot rings out, and goes wild. He thumbs the hammer, recocking the gun. The ringmaster's grotesque tongue snakes out of his wide mouth as he theatrically squints with one eye to take proper aim.

A shot rings out again, this time from Ricardo. A perverse flower of blood blossoms on the dirty shirt of the ringmaster clown. His mouth opens in a silent "O" as he falls to his knees. With a final shudder, he plants his painted face in the dust.

Enraged, the last clown standing strafes the wreckage where Ricardo has taken cover. Sparks and ricochets fly as the robotic monkey grinds its organ of death. Grimacing, Ricardo ducks properly behind cover, covering his head as bullets whiz as angry hornets around his head. Miraculously, none of them hit home.

Dr. Farsight calmly pulls another arrow from his quiver, nocks it and releases it in a smooth motion. The clown looks down stupidly as the arrow embeds itself in his torso, the shaft making him look like a particularly bald porcupine. In a moment, the shaft gets a companion shaft. The monkey stops grinding its organ of death.

The clown falls, and with him the gang known as Killer Klowns is eradicated. If anything, Redmond is a better place without them. Dr. Farsight swiftly slings his bow, and goes back to the now burning wreckage of the cab.

Now that those who needed to be dead are dead, he must take care of the living. Cogwhistle makes his way out of that which used to be a cab. Warily, with an eye out for enemies, he drags himself over to Ricardo. Ricardo is plopped down in cover some good thirty or so meters away from the smoking wreckage.

Dr. Farsight comes carrying his doctor's bag and the rest of the cargo in the cab's trunk. He calmly starts assessing the collective wounds. Some stitches, a compress – his hands work fast and steadily. A quiet "whomp" as the fire finally ignites the ethanol tank and starts to properly consume the cab.

Vince and Jinx come running down the block. "Dammit – missed it!" Jinx' outburst is somewhat startling, but not as much as Vince's reaction. He eyes the clowns with something approaching greed. Quickly patting them down for any valuables, he finds only a meager handful of coins, a handful of bullets for the revolver, and a small ream of ammunition for the robot death monkey.

1-04: The gang is back together

Vince drags the bodies of the dead clowns a few hundred yards back to the brick building. It is better to be inside now that it is full dark. He leaves the fat clown, the clown's carcass still smoldering, a sickly sweet smell of spoiled bacon permeating the area.



Cogwhistle, Ricardo and Dr. Farsight then comes in a middle troupe, favoring their respective wounds. Even healing magic from Cogwhistle didn't erase all the tracks from their run-in with the clowns. Jinx follows as a rear guard, carefully looking for any traces of pursuit. There is none. Even at night, Redmond seems deserted – at least here, close to the large brick structure of the factory.

While Vince drags the dead japing jesters, he opens a comms channel to Mr Coussos, his buddy and cybertechnologist. "Yes." The flat, monotone, and electronically generated voice of Mr Coussos answers almost immediately. "It's Vince." "Yes." The voice still doesn't reveal any emotion. "I've got a couple of dee bees that I think contain some cyberware that can be... recycled. Recycling is caring, right?" There's no response to the weak attempt at a joke. Vince doesn't seem surprised. "Anyways, could you help a troll out?"



Mr Coussos, apparently. The Hippocratic Oath seems more of a suggestion, really. (Image is of a Warhammer 40k Inquisitor, I believe. It serves nicely as Mr Coussos)



The flat voice is quiet for a couple of seconds. “Yes. Put your phone on top of the bodies, and leave them in view from above under the open sky. I will send a drone to retrieve them shortly.”

Vince does as he is asked, dropping the bodies near the fallen smoke stack and placing his phone on the chest of one of the carcass of one of the assailants. Unfamiliar iconography flashes on the screen of his pocket secretary, before stabilizing itself to an old school sonar display. It seems to be slowly pulsing. His curiosity piqued, Vince leans toward a more solid section of the smoke stack, and waits while scanning the neighborhood with his eyes.

In the meantime, Ricardo, Cogwhistle, Jinx and Dr. Farsight have entered the building. On a hunch, Jinx decides to drop a piece of bloodied cloth from one of the clowns down into the tank filled with oily water. To her fascination and disgust, a roiling mass of white, wormlike creatures about 8 – 10 cm long appear, wriggling around in the water, swarming around the cloth.

Losing interest in the icky worms, Jinx starts looking at the concealed door in the other tank. It is locked, apparently with a solid deadbolt, from the other side. Pulling out her demolitions kit, she starts forming about a hundred grams of plastic explosive in a wiener-like configuration and carefully tamps it into the seam outlining the door. Some eight click a second magic should blow that door wide open.

Suddenly, the muffled thumping of twin rotors breaks the silence. Outside, Vince has been following some dim navigational lights with some interest. A small rotor drone quickly approaches and sets down next to the bodies. It is perhaps the size of a large refrigerator. Eight metallic tentacles telescope out of the drone, four to each side.



Extending stretcher-like struts, the tentacles drag the bodies onto the drone, one to each stretcher. One of the tentacles push the pocket secretary down from the dead ringmaster’s chest. As quickly as it landed, the drone chopper takes off again with its dead cargo. Vince picks up his phone, and walks inside nonchalantly. It’s quiet in there, the only noise heard being Jinx and her quiet tamping of the explosive charge. Vince briefly wonders where Schneider is.



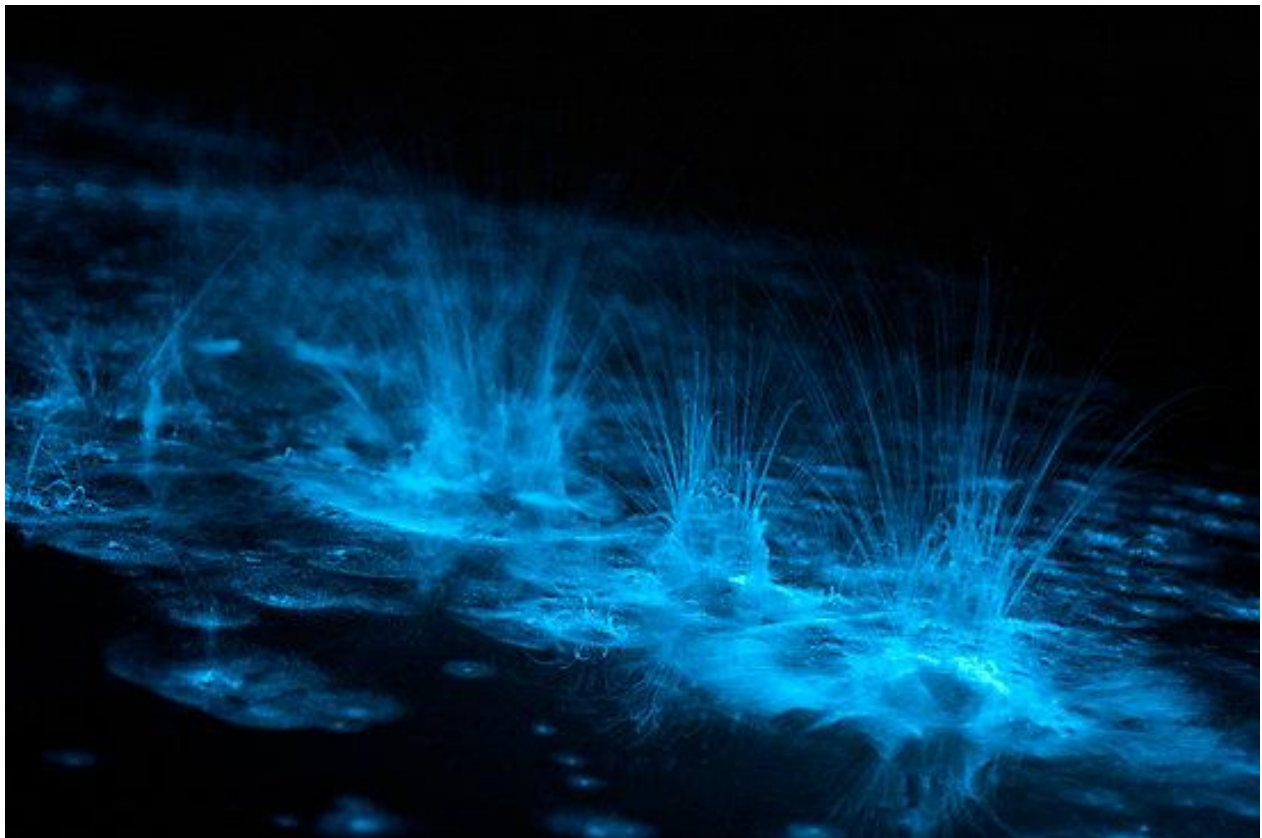
1-04: A song and a proposal

[A popular song](#) suddenly breaks the silence. Perhaps slightly chagrined, Dr. Farsight grabs his phone. “Hello, dis is Herr Schmidt.” A German accent straight out of comic relief, so thick that one could use it as armor against small arms fire, greets him. “Ve haf a proposition to make...” It is almost as if Dr. Farsight can see the steeping of fingers, even though the call is audio only.

After a while, Dr. Farsight snaps his phone shut, and opens up a banking application. With a few taps on his screen, he executes a few transactions, then shuts down his phone again. “Vince,” he says. “I’ve transferred four thou to the slush fund account. We’ve got a job from one of the guys we delivered the crates to, remember them?”

With that, he opens up his bag of tricks again, pulls on a pair of latex gloves, and starts sampling various things. A sample of air here, a quick dip into the pool of worms after getting them agitated with a synthetic blood bag... again, he works quickly to secure samples.

Cogwhistle goes astral while Dr. Farsight is securing samples. The dwarf mage directs his astral body down through the concealed door. Inside, there’s a sort of rank *smell* in the astral space, as if there was some marsh or other just around the corner. He notices a large, box-like deadbolt-style lock on the door, seemingly inert. There’s a corridor here, almost organic in nature – as if it was burrowed out by some strange (but large!) animal. Faintly glowing organisms line the walls like glowing barnacles.





The pseudo-coral surface of the tunnel worries Cogwhistle. His astral ghost floats through the tunnel for a couple of hundred meters. It first dips down, and then climbs back up again towards the end. He finds a similar door to the tank's concealed door blocking the tunnel's exit, with a similar lock – again, on the other side of the door.

Cogwhistle can just barely make out the broad deadbolt securing this new door. He decides not to go through the door. The fetid smell of the marsh is stronger here, at the end of the tunnel, and this worries him – smell shouldn't penetrate to the astral plane.

Feeling as if he was wading through thigh-high water, he pushes his way back to his limp body, and repossesses it with a relieved sigh – half thought, half said. He sits back up from his slumped position, his back against the brick wall of the factory. Jinx, Ricardo, Vince and Dr. Farsight looks somewhat relieved when Cogwhistle starts moving again.

Jinx is getting impatient. "Can I blow the door now?" Nodding assent, Ricardo and Cogwhistle nevertheless put some more distance between them and the explosive charge that Jinx has rigged up on the concealed door in the steel tank's side. Barely able to contain her glee, Jinx triple-presses the detonator. A loud "pop" announces that the charge went off.

Though the severely bent door is popped open, it isn't quite blown off its hinges. Vince crumples the door so that he can fit. With some disgust, he notices that the boxy shape of the deadlock is *oozing*. He motions to Dr. Farsight. Dr. Farsight mentions that it's likely some sort of crustacean.

With a flourish, Dr. Farsight collects samples from the odd thing, numbed to the exotic strangeness of it all. So many strange things have happened recently, it is difficult to have a fresh sense of wonder about it all. Dr. Farsight, Jinx, and Cogwhistle have all the start of a minor



but insistent headache. Vince mentions something about “background count”. Nobody seems to notice that. Vince again wonders where Schneider is.

Advancing through the tunnel, with Vince as point man, it is clear that this tunnel wasn’t carved out. It seems more as if it was melted or *eaten* out. The bioluminescence, though useful for lighting their way, is creepy – and the barnacle-like creatures even more so. The odiferous stench of putrefaction is obvious as they approach the other door, some 238 meters later as noted by Ricardo.

It’s Jinx that first notices the tinkling of water on the other side of the door. Dr. Farsight agrees. Looking through his bag of tricks, he produces a vial of a liquid. “This should help weaken the calcite of the crustacean lock.”

With the aid of some plastic tubing, he manages to get most of the contents of the vial onto the living deadbolt mechanism. A minute later, some foaming is evident. With a mighty effort, Vince stomps his foot into the door. The weakened deadbolt snaps, and the door springs open. Quickly, Vince steps through and on general principle slams the butt of his bo stick into the boxy main body of the crustacean. “On general principle,” he grunts. Nobody says anything.





The tree that greets them just inside the door is majestic and almost preternaturally verdant. It sits in a barrel-like tank filled with a disgusting organic slurry. The smell of dead things permeates the entire structure. An entire forest is set up through this hall with a vault-like roof, lit by some unseen ambient light source. Still, the tree set in the stout barrel is the largest one, and seemingly the most vital one.

Dr. Farsight is steadily taking samples as the gang stealthily creep through the vaulted hall. There's no rustling of leaves or other indication of animal life. As they approach the other end of the hall, the sound of machinery becomes evident. A production line? There's no sound other than the rhythmic thumping of the machinery – no radio, no talking, no walking.

The double doors leading into what is presumably a production line have large cutouts in them, filled with frosted plastics. They can see shapes almost hypnotically moving in a pattern inside, like some strange, robotic version of a Punch and Judy show. Occasionally, grinding noises disrupt the pattern for a little while.

Covered by the rest, Dr. Farsight and Jinx carefully pushes the double doors ajar and peek in. A wholly automated production line with robots is manufacturing components here, apparently more of the devices from the crates – the brain-based pocket secretaries. A large red tank with an enormous grinder is positioned at the edge of the factory floor. Piping connects it to the vaulted hall functioning as a greenhouse. Ricardo voices what they all think in a stage whisper: "So that's what they do with the parts they don't use."





Jinx is the first that notices the humanoid figure sitting with its back towards the entrance doors, at the far end of the factory floor. The section where the figure is sitting is slightly elevated from the main factory floor, and thick, Perspex windows. The figure is seemingly oblivious to their presence.

1-04: The conflict with the floor manager

Dr. Farsight ponders the neck and hairless head of the humanoid figure. The skin of the person has an odd sheen to it. Dermal sheathing? Some sort of orthoskin treatment? And the odd way the figure moves – smoothly, not like a robot, but still fundamentally *unhuman*...

Quietly, they quickly set about setting up an ambush. Jinx sneaks out her slingshot. Dr. Farsight nocks an arrow on his bow, tensioning up the bow as he does so. Ricardo covers the rear. Vince advances down the stairs, with a stealthiness belying his bulk. With a mighty *thwack!*, Jinx launches her steel ball bearing towards the figure's head. A white, star-shaped impact mark appears, perfectly centered on the Perspex glass separating the figure and Jinx. The figure whirls around, contorting oddly as it does.



Cogwhistle unleashes his most powerful mana spell. The figure slumps slightly on its seat, then sits up again. Cogwhistle is *sure* that the mana spell has disrupted the aura of the figure – it is after all alive, after a fashion, but the recovery is completely unexpected.



Swearing like a sailor, Jinx shoves the slingshot into her waistband, and pulls out her MGL-6 grenade launcher. Aiming and firing in a smooth movement, the shotgun-like grenade launcher spits its impact-primed grenade towards the target. With a mighty boom, the grenade explodes pretty much where the white star of the previous impact was. This time, the effect of the attack is significant – a cone-shaped crater of Perspex appears where the material is blown away by the grenade.

The being, faster than it has any right to be, simply puts its mouth to the newly created hole in the Perspex sheet, distends its jaw like a snake about to eat its prey – and then *blows*. A noxious miasma is briefly visible as the being blows something into the factory floor air.

Dr. Farsight releases his arrow. With a meaty impact, the arrow embeds itself in the open mouth of the creature. Like a marionette puppet with its strings cut, the being falls backwards and out of sight.

Moving as fast as possible, Vince ran down the stairs and onto the factory floor, grabbing a tablet and stylus that was perched on a table near the edge of the factory floor. Turning as fast as he can, he grabs a gas mask from one of the side pockets on his backpack, quickly securing it to his head. “Run!” he shouts.

Jinx pulls out a filter mask from one of her pockets, securing it to her head. Dr. Farsight gets a compress from a side pocket, and pours some water on it. Holding it to his mouth, he starts running down through the vaulted greenhouse, closely followed by the rest. Ricardo is just holding his breath while running as fast as he can.

Soon, they approach the broken door leading down to the organic-looking tunnel. With a loud gasp, Ricardo can’t hold his breath any more. They continue running pell-mell down the tunnel. At the steel tank, Vince boosts his chummers out of the tank, before quickly following on their heels.

Pale, Jinx announces, “I don’t feel so good...” Cogwhistle just suddenly keels over, and slumps to the ground, *hard*. Jinx sits down, and promptly throws up – tearing off her filter mask in the process. Ricardo looks alarmed at this turn of events. Vince just concentrates on breathing through his gas mask. Dr. Farsight ditches the compress. It probably won’t do him any good now at any rate. And Schneider is still missing.

