



Dealing With Jinx

or

Dancing With the Devils

Mission title:	<i>Dealing With Jinx or Dancing With the Devils</i>
Mission log:	1-05
Mission Johnson:	
Mission reward:	<i>Special</i> (apparent: a tattoo and Astral Perception)
Participants:	Jinx

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1-05: The meat is lacking, but the spirit may be willing...

It was late at night – getting so late that one could argue that it was getting to be early morning. The lightly acidic Seattle drizzle drummed weakly against the armored plastic window. The window sill was bleached and somewhat blotchy from the constant, slightly acidic rains. It would still stop a high caliber bullet, though.

Dr. Farsight hung another IV drip with massive doses of broad spectrum antibiotics with tired precision. The still form of the young woman on a pallet didn't stir or shift. Her superficial, fast breathing was at least regular, if worrying. The cooling apparatus he'd juryrigged out of an old garden hose and some other assorted tubing to keep her high fever at bay had a slight sheen of condensation on it, drip-dripping a gentle line of moisture to the sink.

He glanced over at the other prone form in the apartment, this one a stocky dwarf. The dwarf made do with only a broad spectrum IV drip. His fever, though high, wasn't critical. For some reason, though, the dwarf just didn't regain consciousness. There wasn't a medical explanation for that that Dr. Farsight knew of. With a sigh, dr. Farsight rubbed his eyes, and grabbed yet another cup of coffee from the percolator burbling in the corner. The caffeine wasn't doing him any good, and he knew his digestion currently hated him, but the hot beverage was exactly what the doctor ordered.

With a weak chuckle and a shake of his head at his own tired joke, he sipped the coffee and grimaced. At least it woke him up. His magical metabolism wouldn't like any of the stimulants that were lined up in his "crash cart" – his doctor's bag standing open and ready closeby, in case of any code blues. He was still hoping it wouldn't get to that. His patients were still hanging on – barely, in the case of Jinx. Cogwhistle seemed to have an edge so far, probably through his dwarven resilience. Dr. Farsight just hoped the dwarf would continue to tough it out.

The visual inspection didn't tell him anything that the medical sensors constantly relaying the comatose pair's vitals to his screen wall hadn't already. Dr. Farsight knelt in front of his screen wall, very carefully picked up his bow, and started doing nock-and-pull exercises again. His eyes were closed, his body very carefully tensing and relaxing. He didn't dare sit down in a chair. He'd likely fall asleep, considering that he'd been up for more than 30 hours. Right now, light exercise kept him from drifting off. The medical software would alert him if anything dramatic happened.

Dr. Farsight didn't notice the slight flutter on the EEG of both his patients. The brain activity was slight, but both Jinx and Cogwhistle were deep in a faint theta rhythm. Though apparently comatose, they were both dreaming...

1-05: The Stone on the Heath

Jinx found herself growing aware of a whistling wind in her ears. Her eyes snapped open, the last of her drowsiness fleeing from her in an instant. She was standing in a twilight heath under an overcast sky, apparently only with the wind as her companion. Her body felt somehow *heavy, wrong*, not there.



For some reason, she wasn't wearing her usual gear. The usual, reassuring warmth and weight of her body armor was missing. Jinx crossed her arms and tucked her hands into her armpits. Wherever *here* was, she was freezing. Teeth chattering, she looked around, scanning for clues that could tell her at least something about where *here* was.



A white, mossy stone marker was some distance off to her side, apparently haphazardly placed. The fine mist obscured any other landmarks. Stamping her feet for warmth, she made her way over to the stone marker, hoping to find some mark, something to signify where she was now.

As she came closer, it was apparent that the stone marker was covered in sigils. Some of the sigils were finely rounded, carved into the rock with precision and elegance. Others were more clumsy, far more uneven in their finish, and completely different in appearance – almost runic and linear to the rounded elegance of the most prominent writing. Yet others were mostly crude pictograms depicting stick figures, apparently hunting some strange animals she didn't recognize. The moss obscured some of the writing.

Kneeling in the damp heath, Jinx tried to brush off some of the moss with her fingers. A sharp jolt went through her body, as if an electrical short had grounded through her. The moss felt strange – both *there* and *not there* – and when she had managed to pull off a clump of it, there had been a sharp jolt. She could've sworn she also had seen a blue arc. However, the writing it had covered seemed a lot more legible than the rest – it seemed to be in a language she could *almost* read, if she just could concentrate...

Suddenly, it was as if the sun had broken through the cloud cover, or as if some joker had put a spotlight directly on her back. If it had been a *cold* sun, or a spotlight emitting *cold* light. She turned around. Some of the light mist seemed to have inexplicably withdrawn, revealing a dry, red, mound of sand some distance away. On that mound of sand, she could just barely make out some figures, flickering and moving in the wind as if they were somehow less substantial than she. In a heartbeat, the sky fell dark as if the unseen sun had impossibly disappeared.



1-05: Meeting the Collective

The group of four suddenly stood in front of her, as if having approached her without the niceties of *walking* over to her. One second there, the next right in front of her. And they had brought the night with them. It was bitterly cold, and the wind had died down to nothing from one heartbeat to the next.



They looked *old* somehow. And weary. The lightning in their eyes and the light inside their weird shadowy tentacle-hair crawled tiredly around the outline of their heads, their faces kept in a permanent rictus, an obscene parody of a smile. Small motes of dust, shining with their own luminescence, occasionally fell off their robed bodies. They outlined the darkness with weak, uneven light.

{We | This group | Association} have a proposition for {you | small group | collective}.

The thought impinged on her consciousness as unobtrusively as the noise of fingernails on a blackboard. Startled, Jinx was speechless for a moment. She blurted out, “what proposition?”

{We | Collective | Corporation} will grant power in return for {services | favors | obligations}.



It was a tempting offer. Somehow, she didn't perceive any duplicity on the part of the entities in front of her. Though alien in thought or whatever it was, there was very little deception there. "Who are you? Obligations as in what? Will I hurt my friends?"

{We | Collective | Aggregate} were once {dead | defunct | exhausted}, but now {exist | work | function} again. {We | Unity | Wholeness} fight the {automaton | clockwork | enemy}.

They pondered the rest of her question for a moment. They were ... confused. Trying a different tack, they expounded on their offer.

The {machine | enemy | mechanism} is coming. {We | Collective | Association} offer power for {you | small group | collective}'s {allegiance | joining | fusion}.

"And what would my part be?" Jinx' question was dripping with greed, but the inhuman nature of the other side of the bargain made her ... hesitant.

Collection of resources. {Growth | Recruitment | Conversion} of assets. {Conflict | War | Destruction} of the {machine | enemy | mechanism}. Temporary reduction of autonomy.

"And I won't hurt my friends, the runners I run with?" The confusion from the strange, spirit-like creatures in front of her was almost palpable. They still couldn't comprehend.

Apprehension and greed warred within Jinx. She could *feel* the power emanating from the strange beings that patiently waited for her answer. If they could lend her that kind of power, who knew what she would be able to do? Also, a quavering voice of fear lent itself to the conflict. What if she said *no*? How would these beings react *then*? In the end, she made up her mind. "Frag it. Sure. I accept."

The being reached out to Jinx, two hands suddenly apparent from the void of its silhouette. Reflexively, Jinx grasped the hands. The hands were cold, far colder than they had any right to be. Flashes of strange vistas exploded in her mind's eye as she fell to her knees still clasping the hands of the thing, still desperately clinging to consciousness.

She saw an old civilization slowly grinding to a halt, no longer interested in what their dying planet could offer. She *felt* the cessation of activity, the suspension of life. She could *taste* the years as the atmosphere grew thinner, the water receded, the planet grew colder.

Then, suddenly, the *other*. That which fell from the sky from an unusual space-time event. The antithesis of the collective, the singular consciousness spread in many bodies. A slow war of attrition followed. Then, as almost all resources had been exhausted, an outside agency. A small vessel made planetfall, with resources. Like a plant, spores were formed and sent on the vessel. It returned to Earth. Elation that the war had ended. Despair when the other had secreted itself on the vessel as well. And the start of a new war – or the continuation of the old.



The power flowed into her like a torrent of cold water, of untold potential. Her consciousness shrank to a small pinpoint of light as she could *feel* the otherness, the essence of the otherness, enter her very soul, her essence of being. Everything faded to black again.

1-05: [We're here](#)

Jinx' eyes snapped open. With a jerky move, she sat up, absentmindedly removing the tubing around her head, the IV drip in her arm, dispassionately freeing herself from the tangled medical web she found herself in.

The medical sensors went nuts, alarms going off like some demented musician playing the national anthem. In a flash, dr. Farsight was at her side. "No, don't touch that! You're very sick and need treatment!" Jinx looked up at the frowning elf. "I feel fine", she protested.

Confused, dr. Farsight consulted his sensors again. "Yes... you're fine. But you weren't, you were critical. Now, you're not..." Exhaustion crept into his voice as he spoke. Pinching the bridge of his nose with his right hand, he slowly shook his head. "That doesn't make any kind of sense. You were critical, I'm sure of that..."

Jinx climbed groggily to her feet, and stretched. "Well, doctor, I feel fine now. Though I need to use the can. And no peeking!" Talking to her back as she slunk into the bathroom, dr. Farsight muttered, "As a medic, I fraggging *hate* magic". Still muttering to himself, he checked on his other patient. Still out cold, comatose.

Dr. Farsight canceled the urgently blinking feeds from Jinx' now disconnected sensors. The colorful fluctuation in Cogwhistle's EEG readings caught his eye. The dwarven mage wasn't comatose after all. *Something* was going on there. But what? He rewound the feed from Jinx. The same fluctuations there, like Cogwhistle was having. Subdued, but clearly *there*.

Right in the instant before the feed terminated, a massive surge – almost a seizure. And then, in the last few instants before the feed lost connection, almost an *echo* of sorts, overlaying and then integrating into the normal EEG activity of a person awake and aware.

The sound of the toilet flushing brought dr. Farsight out of his reverie. Jinx returned from the bathroom, looking shamelessly fit. "I'm hungry. Wanna get some soyburgers or something?"