

The Roles We Play

Chapter One: Dump Stats

keysterking: y u no holo bitch?

Hannah's eyes flickered to the chat, but only for a moment. Once more she ignored the question, as she had the last ten times someone in chat had asked it today, like they'd asked every day for the past two weeks. Only two weeks, as before that she'd been on vacation for the Week o' Gaming. Before then, the pattern continued ad nauseam.

At least he'd spelled her handle right. Stupid fucker probably pronounced it wrong though, one of those assholes who tried to cram it all into one syllable. She hated him immediately.

"All right guys, I think I'm gonna go dive build this match, see if we can do some serious suicide bombing," she said. Was her mic turned down too quiet? It had been bothering her all day, but the chat said it sounded fine. Maybe there was something off with her headset settings. Murder occasionally trampled over them, the stupid cat, and it wasn't unheard of for her to step on the keyboard or otherwise fuck up her rig.

She queued up as Dirge; he was one of her stronger heroes in *Scrummage*, and the latest patch had left a nice exploitable loophole on his stacking Sins of the Father talent. Not that she needed exploits; her stream got views for wit and clever use of invective, not because she was the best at what she did. Last she'd checked, she was Alpha League tier 2, which meant she was somewhere in the top eight hundred or so in the world, but nowhere near good enough to go pro. Just as well. Esports pros had to practice all day, wear corporate logos and drill until their game was actual work.

Hannah activated her taunt macro, and Dirge did a handstand, his kilt flying up and the space where his asshole should be blurred a split second too late. No matter – she didn't tag her stream as family friendly. She gave the mic a throaty laugh and launched herself into the fray.

One of the nice things about *Scrummage* was that it required constant map and minimap awareness, which meant less time spent dwelling on the chat. Not that chat was always bad, but there was almost always a prick or two that her chat-bot couldn't squelch in time. As Dirge necrophaged his way from enemy to enemy, she was only aware that the chat occasionally moved, but not what it actually said.

That is, until Major Jagger blew his ult, uppercutting Dirge into the air and stunning him, where three other heroes quickly surrounded and destroyed her. Twenty-seven seconds until she respawned.

f1marcel: lol thats what u get for being greedy

Shoblueskies: stupid use of uppercut – now not gonna have it next team fite

Luckypokes: Dirg has good dive but no escape – trash tier

keysterking: so y u no holo?

Hannah's finger was moving to kick him when her respawn activated, and the game continued. As she pursued one objective and defended a checkpoint, she was actually having a really strong match.

"All these squishies taste gooooooooooooood," she said in a guttural voice. "And me without my barbeque sauce!" Another dive, and Cybraxos bought it before his player could even hit his evade.

Soon, her team had pressed into the enemy base. It was a 4v3 advantage, but if they did their jobs right, they could end this thing right here right now. She pinged for her party to attack and plunged after their database, unloading everything she had, evading attacks as best she could.

Her team ignored the ping, and she went down with the database still sitting pretty at over 13,000 hit points. Meanwhile, her remaining three teammates focused on the boss mercenary camp. Probably the wiser tactic, but that didn't make her respawn timer move any quicker.

"Nice team fighting, pussies. I see we're employing the old bore-them-to-death route. They'll never see it coming," she said into the team voice chat.

"Don't get salty, Bwitch," retorted their healer. "Hey, are you streaming now?"

"Sure am, Gothmor. Around seventeen hundred people just saw you run off and piss yourself."

He laughed. "That's awesome."

Awesome. Why did the shit players always think it was funny when she insulted them? Maybe she needed to be meaner. She had a brand to consider, after all.

Meanwhile, the chat streamed on.

potzihoohoo: don't sweat it

negadik: ur team sux

potizhoohoo: ur gonna win anyway

oelazer: are you going to stream Cannon Fodder again any time soon?

As Hannah prepared to address the question, there he was again.

keysterking: holo?

That was it. Hannah positively snarled at her camera. She knew full well that a lot of female streamers sprung for the holo stream. She also knew that was because a ton of asshole perverts could project them into their bedroom and jack it like the asshole perverts they were.

That wasn't her – and not only because she wasn't built like Kasa Arae and those self-effacing whores. She had meat on her bones, and then some more meat on her meat. If she *did* holo, she'd probably lose a few hundred subscribers simply from the creeps who were so shallow they didn't want to see her in all her ample glory. But the real reason she didn't want to project a 3D image of herself into the homes and offices of

her fan base was because she had something Kasa Arae and her ilk didn't have. Self-respect.

Also, a liberal dose of anger issues, which her craven teammates – now finally taking down the database as she futilely rushed to catch them before they brought it down – had exacerbated.

“Hey, keysterking, you got a spoon handy?”

keysterking: ?

“Because I wanted to invite you to eat my asshole. No, come to think of it, make it a ladle – I think I feel something on its way out.”

keysterking: y u mad i just ask ?

“You ask the same stupid-ass question a million times, and you think I don't get what you're really after,” said Hannah, the vitriol in her voice practically threatening to melt her mic. On impulse, she hooked a finger in the neckline of her t-shirt and tugged it down for a fleeting moment. “There, ya happy? I have tits. Lord fuck a nun, I have tits. Now fuck off to the kitchen and see about that ladle, K sweet pea?”

Hannah slammed her finger on the ban button before she had to read another inane, chauvinist word. Except, of course, her ban was met with a chorus of lol's, which she welcomed, and an even mix of compliments on her cleavage. By most streamer standards, she had a fairly gender-diverse fan base: almost ten percent female. No surprise that the slightest reference to sex and these cave dwellers lost it.

QkralsDNRO204: damn gurrll

Revolvermain: no way those things are real lol

****NEW SUBSCRIBER: 007K9 – 12 months!****

Lurxxor: love me a thicc chicc

The database fell. She gg'ed her teammates and logged out of *Scrummage*, her camera now showing viewers a shot of her desktop, featuring a cartoon of a little girl who vaguely resembled her playing with a dead puppy.

“Thanks for the subscribe, 007K9, All right, guys. Much as I'd love to stay and play with you all night, it's game night with my local tabletop group. New night, new campaign – got high hopes.” She almost said “high hopes it's better than the last one,” but she was always paranoid one of the gang followed her anonymously.

“So don't forget to smash the Like button, and if you wanna see more of the Twitch stream, hit the Subscribe while you're at it.”

xxxkeysterkingxxx: lol i wudnt mind seeing more ;)

Hannah tried not to grit her teeth. Fucking trolls always had a backup handy. “For now, that's all I got for you, so go out there and either end a life or get a life.” She ended with her trademark roar and logged off her stream.

The game had gone a little longer than she'd anticipated, but she still took the time to change into a tank top before heading off to game night.

“Holy *fuck*,” Hannah muttered to no one in particular as she gazed up (and up, then up some more) at One Tulley Center. Brendan’s apartment building. She wasn’t one to get political – couldn’t, really, in her line of work – but it was hard not to look at the high-rise apartment, compare it to the roach-infested squalor his employee had long shared with five roommates, and not think something critical about the haves vs. the have-nots. Keon had since moved back into his parents’ house and endured the commute while he saved up. She suspected Brendan didn’t do a lot of enduring.

There was a doorman and everything, a grandfatherly fellow with a bushy mustache. He stood next to a stool, and had the appearance of someone who’d been doing so for quite some time.

“Can I help you, Miss?” he said, stepping away from his station to intercept her path to the nearby elevators.

“Nope, I’m good. Just going to the elevators.” He plainly meant to stop her from doing so, but she couldn’t make it that easy on him. Hannah went to step around him, but he hastily adjusted to block her.

“I see. And who are you here to visit?”

“Brendan Pierce. How about you?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Who are you here to visit? Dressed like that, I’m guessing the emperor of Japan. Maybe P.T. Barnum.”

He brushed some invisible dust off of his uniform. “Very amusing, Miss. And you are...?”

“Hannah. Cooksey.”

“I see.” His eyes flickered for a moment. “Ah, there you are. Welcome, Ms. Cooksey.” Stiffly, he showed her to the elevator, where he had to use a key before hitting the button for Brendan’s floor, 58.

“You get a lot of people scoring invites only to waste an hour button mashing in the elevator, do you?”

His back was still to her as the elevator door closed. She enjoyed her joke in solitude as she undertook the long ride up. Who the hell lived on the fifty-eighth floor of anything? The buttons only went to sixty-two. Damn.

For a moment, Hannah was tempted to see what would happen if she didn’t step out when the door opened, but rather than play some more with the jerkwad in the foyer, she stepped out onto the fifty-eighth floor of One Tulley Center. Even the hallways looked posh. For crying out loud, there were tables with decorative ceramics and ornaments. Why in the love of fuck would people spend money decorating the hallway of their condo building like it was their grandmother’s family room?

A moment later she was at the door to the address she'd been given for Brendan's apartment. As she raised her hand to knock, though, the door swung open, leaving her standing there with a fist raised awkwardly in front of a strange teenage girl.

Her hair was magenta, her nails canary yellow, her eyes too azure a blue to not be a dyejob. The ass-length hair and bright eyes combined with an insipid green and a quiet gasp to make her into something practically out of anime.

"Uh... you're not Brendan. Do I have the wrong place?" She looked at the number on the door. Apartment H, like she'd been told. Had that guy hit the wrong floor button just to fuck with her?

"Are you B-witch?!" the girl asked, hands clasped to her chest.

"Nope, I'm Sandwich, but I get mistaken for her all the time," she said guardedly, one of her default responses on the rare occasion she bumped into a fan in the real world.

The girl laughed delightedly. "That is SO something you would say!" she exclaimed giddily. "Come in, come in! My dad's setting up the table in the game room. I'm Gladys, by the way."

"I'd make a pun about it, but I'm sure they've all been done." Hannah stepped into the apartment, almost nervous to let the door close behind her and leave her trapped with this evident fangirl. At least it was a girl.

As for the apartment itself... the neighborhood alone made the place impressive, and the décor was priced to match. Paintings of cityscapes from around the world dominated the walls, and the rest was all artisanal – lamps with weirdly shaped frosted glass shades, a couch with one side that arced up like it was trying to be a hammock, an adjoined open concept kitchen filled with vantablack appliances juxtaposed with chrome handles, knobs and trim. There was even one of those wall TVs perpendicular to that odd couch; in an era where the TV size wars had finally lost their steam due to the advent of holoivid.

Hannah herself didn't get why someone would spend four grand on a holoprojector with a display the size of a housecat when the same money would get a 2D TV taller than most people, but then, she was old school – as the girl reminded her presently.

"Actually, my name was originally Glados," she said, enunciating the distinction. "My dad was super into this video game where there was this evil AI named Glados, and he even put it on the birth certificate, but my mom caught him and got super pissed and they split up."

This was a lot of information to process unprompted. "Wait, your dad named you after the bad guy from *Portal*, and your mom divorced him for it?"

“I dunno. Probably there was other stuff, too. I don’t like to ask them about it – low sodium diet, ya know?” She beamed with self-satisfaction at borrowing one of Bwitch’s stock jokes about saltiness.

“Write your own material, Gladys,” she said curtly.

“Totes, totes. So yeah, you’ve heard of *Portal*, huh? I’ve never actually played it. Maybe you could, like, stream it sometime? That would be awesome!”

“You want me to stream a decades-old game?” She arched an eyebrow, looking around for any sign of Brendan or her friends.

“I dunno, some people like the oldies streams, right?” Gladys’ lips pursed.

“Yeah. Mostly the people who are already following them.”

“You could, like, do a speed run?” The girl was slowly wilting.

“Sure. I’ll just take months and months of time replaying the same game over and over until it’s a total chore so that I’ll have two hours of quality content. Not the content any of my subscribers signed on for, but hey, who needs to afford rent, right?”

Gladys’ chin practically hit the floor in sheer mortification. “It’s, like, way funnier when you’re mean online,” she mumbled.

Hannah took a breath, but before she could try to mitigate it, there was a knock at the door. Gladys was decidedly less spirited about answering it this time. Keon was standing on the other side, and from the look of him, she’d just missed the rainstorm that had been threatening on her ride over.

“Dad’s in the game room,” Gladys said sullenly, pointing at the adjoining hallway. At that, she shuffled over to the couch, plopped down against the raised portion, and turned on the TV. There was no volume, but she probably had the audio piping into her implant. Parents the world over had to still be rejoicing over that little innovation.

“So, is it weird being in your boss’s apartment?” she said in a low voice. If Gladys did have the TV playing via implant, she’d be pretty unlikely to be able to understand her. Still, she knew full well kids could be wiley, and wouldn’t put it past the kid to be pretending to be focused on the TV while instead eavesdropping on unsuspecting visitors.

“Nah, not really. I’ve been here a few times, delivering documents and stuff. One time I had to make a return trip to bring him and one of the other partners dinner while they were working a big case, because they didn’t trust the delivery people to get their order right.”

She sighed as they started down the hall. “Remind me why we’re putting up with this guy again?”

There were several doors off the hallway, but it was immediately clear which one was meant for them. For one, Brendan was sitting in it, chatting away with Jacob, who had already “arrived.” For two...

Dwelling on the fifty-eighth floor suddenly took on new meaning. They were located here at the corner of the building, and the entirety of the outer walls were floor to ceiling windows. Though Hannah had quit the Girl Scouts when she was still a Brownie, she had no trouble as recognizing them as being on the southeast corner specifically. She had garbage direction sense and could barely make it to the corner market without GPS, but this room afforded an absolutely breath-taking view of Lake Michigan in the distance, only a couple other buildings competing for the view. The sun was on the far side of the building, leaving them looking into a rapidly darkening landscape, but even as she stepped into the room, a flash of lightning over the lake illuminated the entire city for an instant. The carousel at Navy Pier was visible a mile or so in the distance, and she thought she recognized Lincoln Park closer still.

This place had to cost a fortune, but as someone not writing those checks, it was totally worth it.

Only after Keon elbowed her into knocking off her gaping did she look around at the game room itself, and while it couldn't compete with the world outside the window, it surely did its damndest. A group of three long, posh sofas surrounded a square glass table that was easily five feet to a side. She didn't miss the presence of gadgetry affixed to the underside, and realized this was a fully functional gaming dream table like she'd only ever seen before online. Goodbye to breaking her back lunging across the table to move her token, or having Remy's stupid cat jump on the table for attention and knock over all the scenery. If this worked like she'd bet it did, they could simply connect via implant and adjust tokens, status effects, hit points, interact with terrain... the works. She knew Jacob had pushed hard for the group to go in on something like this before moving to Austin. After he left, the idea had fallen apart because nobody felt like dropping a couple thousand bucks apiece to spruce up somebody else's pad.

The rest of the room wasn't germane to their purpose here, but was still pretty kick-ass. It was expansive, big enough that she'd bet they had to knock down a wall to make space for it all. Holo and video gaming stations along the west wall, with a host of gaming platforms available. Near the door sat a table that could be converted for ping pong, billiards or air hockey, according to the signage along the side. She couldn't guess how, but still. There were even a few ancient arcade games next to a pinball machine taking up the remaining wall space. The center of the room was dominated by a broad mat; a ceiling-mounted holoprojector suggested it was some kind of virtual gym, or for those niche fitness games.

"This is my new favorite room," she said once she'd taken it all in.

Brendan grinned, and she had to hand it to the guy, it wasn't even the shit-eating kind of grin she'd have been wearing in his shoes. It was the grin of a guy who'd created something amazing and was excited to share it.

“Pretty awesome, right?” said Jacob’s holo. “From what I can see of it, anyway. He sent me a pic of the view. Gotta say, pretty jelly over here.”

“In Austin? Aren’t you like right by the Gulf?” said Keon.

Jacob gave his friend a dry look as he settled onto the couch next to him, but it was Brendan who answered. “Austin’s, what, two hundred miles inland? Maybe you’re thinking of Houston...?”

“What’s left of it, after Gordon,” remarked Hannah as she settled in on what she meant to make her own couch.

Keon took a spot on the remaining one, leaving room for Remy when he arrived. “Oh come on, it’s mostly recovered by now. Waste of money if you asked me, rebuilding coastal cities while ocean levels...”

His climate change rant was cut mercifully short by the arrival of his couchmate. “Speaking of mindless forces of destruction,” she quipped.

“Holy fuck, Brendan, this place is tits as shit!” he exclaimed. Hannah wasn’t one to scold people for inappropriate profanity, but Keon took care of that, sighting Gladys in the doorway behind him eyeing him askance, having presumably lead him down here.

“Thanks, man. Been waiting for an excuse to put it to use. Come on in, make yourself at home. Anybody thirsty? I got pop, bottled water, beer, some fruity girly drinks if that’s your thing.”

Jacob raised a holographic can of root beer; the rest took him up on his offer. Hannah couldn’t help but groan and roll her eyes at the over-the-top display as Brendan tapped a few keys and the aforementioned minifridge emerged from behind a hidden door in the wall next to the *Streetfighter II* arcade game. It rolled right over to her sofa and paused for her to retrieve and distribute drinks.

“It’s just a couple Roombas the munchkin and I tweaked. Right, Gladys?” Still standing in the doorway, the girl nodded.

Keon accepted his seltzer water, not at all conspicuously the same flavor his boss has selected. “Wow, you did that yourself? That’s impressive.”

Gladys shrugged. “Nothing so huge. I took a class on robotics in high school and went to this camp, and it’s actually not that tough. Just upgraded the motors and blinded a sensor or two so they’d only follow the one path. It gets stuck on the way back sometimes. I think maybe because when the contents get moved, it messes with weight distribution, and—”

“All right, munchkin. We’re gonna get started here as soon as Toni shows up, so why don’t you give us a little privacy, OK?”

Hannah could hardly believe how precious the girl looked twisting a foot at the toe, addressing her reply to the floor – which, she now noticed, featured an enormous replica of the original Dungeons and Dragons first edition logo. Man, Brendan was a hard core. Or at least had so much money he could play the part. “Um, would it be OK if

I, like, hung out in here? I won't get in the way or anything. I just kinda wanna see what the game's like, and—"

"Gladys, honey, we talked about this. This is for the adults, OK?"

Hannah winced at the patronizing tone. "I really don't mind. She looks house-trained and all."

The girl brightened, but her father quickly put it down. "You don't have to say that, Hannah. She and I already talked about this. If she wants to play, she can play with her own friends." He looked back to Gladys. "You need anything before we start up?"

She shook her head, and with that, shuffled glumly out of the room.

"All right, so we ready to start this bitch?" Remy said, producing a character sheet from backpack. "I got my guy all set up once we get stats rolled. I'm calling him Nutzelshtompfer. I haf been vorking on my German accent, ja."

"You already made a guy?" Hannah asked. "What if you roll like ass? Your build could be invalidated and you're back at the drawing board."

"Build? Come on, Hannah, this is a game, not a science project. Besides, barbarians basically only need Strength and Con. Not like I'm playing some kind of multiclass gimmick. I just wanna hit stuff. Hard." He looked around. "Did you guys show up totally empty-handed?"

Brendan and Hannah had, in fact, done precisely that. Keon had an idea, but kept quiet about it to avoid looking like he was talking down to his boss. The group fell to excited chattering about who was going to play what. Jacob sat back and listened to it all quietly, so quietly she was about to call him on it when Toni rolled in the door.

"Hey guys!" she said brightly. Unlike the others, her first words did not address the grandeur of their surroundings. Instead, she said, "Is that your daughter out there, Brendan?"

"Gladys? Sure is."

She rolled up to the end of Hannah's couch and spoke softly, glancing to the closed door. "I don't mean to be a worry wart, but... is she OK? She looked really sad about something."

He sighed. "She's sulking because she wasn't invited to join in. She graduated in the spring, and almost all of her friends have left for college. I think she's just regretting deciding to take a year off because now she's bored and lonely. Don't worry. She won't be in the problem."

"Oh gosh! That must feel terrible. I don't mind if she plays, if it's all right with you, Jacob."

"I actually only have enough for five players, unfortunately," said Jacob. It was the first thing he'd said in quite a while.

"Enough? Can't you just beef up encounters a little?" Toni asked.

Brendan shook his head at the holo. "You really don't have to."

“And I can’t.” Jacob looked around at the group. “Everybody got the campaign prep download, right?”

They confirmed that they had. Hannah gave him a dirty look. “Do we get to know what that was about, by the way? That thing gummed up my implant for hours before it settled, and none of my software could even tell me what it was.”

Jacob looked surprised. “Really? Huh. We’ve started using a new compression system at the office. Guess it’s not working as well for folks who don’t have our software.”

“Yeah, no shit. I was getting these A/V glitches like crazy – had to shut the thing off before I got a goddamn migraine. I was almost afraid to turn it back on.”

At that, their DM looked less surprised. “Yeah, that makes sense. That was some music, some sound effects and some visual props for the up-coming game. Your implant was probably just decoding microportions of it as it downloaded.”

“That’s... that’s possible?” Toni asked.

“Sure. You’ve never had picked up static or light diffusion while you were watching a holo?”

Hannah cut him off by throwing her beer cap through his holo’s face. “So that was your big new campaign-saving idea? Sound effects and new scenery?”

“Not that you need it. I still think the Week-o’ was totally fun,” Toni added hastily.

Jacob’s flickering blue-white image issued a sly smile from the portable holo he used for sessions. “It’s a little more than that. You guys, we have something I think you’ll find pretty sweet this time around. Something we have definitely never done before.”

“A campaign where we don’t get eaten by the dragon and have our souls turned into nightmare fuel?” Remy returned Toni’s glare. “What? It happened. You were there.”

“No. It’s actually going to involve a little bit of a learning curve for all of us, but I think we’re up to the challenge. A few tweaks to the rules–”

“Dude, if I have to remake Nutzelshtompfer...”

“And some things that are going to be totally new. So, I know we talked a long ways back about swapping out fantasy for sci-fi, and–”

There was an immediate chorus of groans and complaints that drowned out anything else he said.

“I don’t want to have to relearn the rules of a new system!”

“Sci fi is just a thinly layered pretext to moralize at your players and center your politics.”

“Modern tabletop combat is kinda lame – just shoot, take cover. Shoot, throw grenade. Shoot, drop prone.”

Yet it was Brendan's "I dunno, something new seems interesting to me" that brought the griping to an abrupt halt to glare at the newbie. Ultra gaming den or no, the new guy was not going to be the one who helped usher in this blasphemy.

Hannah folded her arms across her chest. "It's not about what's new, Brendan. It's about tradition. We've been playing iterations of D&D for going on twenty years! Whether it was 4e, 5e, Pathfinder 1, Pathfinder 2, Pathfinder 3, Genesys, Narragem, even that Call of Cthulhu thing you got us to try... We're warlocks and warriors. Swords and sorcerers. Blades and blasters."

Jacob waited for her to finish. "You can have blades and blasters in sci fi. The setting we're using is still a magic-using one, and there are still plenty of viable melee weapons and builds. Stabbing stuff and shooting fireballs is still canon."

"So it's not pure sci fi, but sci fi/fantasy," observed Brendan. "That's pretty cool. I've always been a big Star Wars guy. Oooh, so I could be a starfighter pilot! That'd be sweet!"

"Actually, the setting is on a future earth, pre-interstellar flight. So you can pilot planes, some of which might also be spaceworthy, but there won't be X-Wings, quite."

"Oh. Huh."

Remy's eyes narrowed. "So if it's on future earth, you're saying there's no alien races even. So our racial options are limited to what, human and human?"

Toni was ever one to be charitable to her DM, and she strained to throw him a bone. "I'm sure there's more than that. I mean, maybe there's, like, mutants? Or some sort of psionic offshoot, or something?"

"Just humans – though there are psionic humans," said Jacob.

"Right. So no starships, no aliens, no mutants... I think I've heard all I need to hear, gang. Shall we put it to a vote? All in favor, raise your holo-hands. All opposed?" Remy concluded by making a fart noise and wagging a thumbs down in front of Jacob's camera. Hannah quickly seconded the nay, albeit without the sound effect, and Keon guardedly followed suit. Even Brendan shrugged and signaled his own opposition.

"Is there anything else we should know before we decide, Jacob?" Toni asked. "We've gone over some of the rougher points, but I'm sure there are some upsides, too. I'm sure we'll still get to do some of the familiar stuff, right? After all, the world still has princesses in some places, and maybe some of them need rescuing."

Jacob's holo leaned forward, fingertips pressed together. "The upside is, this is the game I have planned. It's good, and I have no doubt you're going to like it. None. Now, since planning for this is practically a part-time job, and I know none of you want to take it on, how about we just accept that the DM has made an unpopular decision and brace ourselves to get onboard with it and move on. All right?"

If not for the rumble of thunder, they could have heard a pin drop. Jacob notoriously deliberated the group's preferences to the point it annoyed even Toni. To

hear him be so decisive, making a decision and imposing it in dictatorial fashion... it was unprecedented. Hannah found herself taken aback – and, to be honest, just a little bit turned on.

“Well then... let’s give it a try,” said Toni at last. What else was there to say? He was absolutely right that nobody else had the time or inclination to run the game. Keon had tried before, but that was before his new job, and on top of it, they’d run roughshod over him at their leisure as he was constantly trying to appease and placate. Jacob understood that being pissed off sometimes was an important part of the playing experience. Revenge was one of the sweetest payoffs there was, and you couldn’t savor it if you hadn’t built up cause to really hate somebody’s guts.

Hannah immediately recategorized this imposition on her preferences as an opportunity for comeuppance later on.

“I’m still playing a barbarian,” Remy muttered.

“We’ll work something out,” Jacob reassured him. Speaking of placating. Still, there were limits, and pushing Remy out of his one and only beloved party role would have costs nobody wanted to pay.

“So what do we do? Is there a manual? An SRD? Anything?” Hannah asked. Whatever the rules to this new system was, she needed to learn them ASAP so she could make a proper character, one who knew how to push them to their limits.

“Actually, I’ve arranged a bit of an intro, something to help you through the process of character creation in what will hopefully be an amusing and instructive way. So, if you’ll let me access your implants, I’ll start it up, and then the process pretty much runs itself.”

At that, the group immediately fell still again. Asking to access someone’s implant was practically as intimate as asking someone to take off their clothes. Frankly, Hannah might prefer that.

Jacob sensed their obvious reticence and held up his hands. “Look, I know it’s an ask, but you know me. I’m not going to muck around with anything, alter settings, or check your browser histories. But I do need to activate certain subroutines from that download I sent you, some of which require access to sensory input and other core permissions. It’s a million times easier to let me do it than make me spend another dozen hours writing an app to do it for me. Have a little faith, you guys.”

There was another long silence before, predictably, Toni acquiesced, giving her quiet smile to the hologram across the table. “I trust you. Go ahead. Come on, you guys. It’s Jacob. He does this stuff for a living. If he says this is gonna be worth it, I for one am curious to see what he’s got up his sleeve.”

Hannah had little doubt Toni was mostly curious to see what he had down his pants, but if Jacob hadn’t picked up any vibes from her in the past decade, she wasn’t about to make it an issue presently.

“Fine,” grumped Remy, though Hannah didn’t miss his eyes flicker before he gave in. Probably deleting his own browser history.

Speaking of which, Hannah took a moment to follow suit, then directed her implant to allow remote access and designated Jacob’s IP. Keon agreed next, but Brendan held up a hand. “Look, I can’t give you access to my implant. I have sensitive client data stored on it, and if they ever found I’d allowed someone access, I could be disbarred. I’ll have to make my guy the old-fashioned way. Sorry, guys.”

Jacob waved away his apology. “I wondered if that might be a concern. Do you have a shell you could use? I could make that work.”

Brendan considered. “I... think so? Man, I used to have one, but I’ll have to see if I still have it. Gimme a minute.” He hopped up and hustled out of the room.

“Wait, we can use a shell? If you’d said something earlier, I could’ve brought—”

“It’s not ideal, Remy” Jacob interjected. “Now, while he’s looking, why don’t I get the rest of you started. This could be somewhat intense, so make sure you move into a comfortable position, take a few deep breaths, and when you’re ready, all you need to do is accept my request.”

As Hannah nestled into the corner of the plush suede couch, she saw Toni fidgeting. So did Keon, evidently, as he quickly got up and offered to help her onto the other end of Hannah’s sofa. She could make it to her feet, and hold it there for a time, but Toni wasn’t strong enough to make it more than a few steps without risking falling. Safer to get help, and they’d all known her long enough that such requests had long since stopped being awkward. It was Toni, after all. Even if her doe-eyed rendition of the kindly cripple occasionally chafed Hannah, there wasn’t much either she or any of the guys wouldn’t do for the woman.

Her implant pinged her to notify an incoming request from Jacob. *User JACOB WINSTONE requesting implant access. WARNING: Access requests from third parties constitute a grave threat to implant security. Do not accept such requests unless you are expecting the request and are sure of the user’s identity and intentions.* Both the request and the warning were read in her implant’s default voice, an upgrade she’d downloaded that made it sound like the deep and otherworldly rumble of some kind of demon. It was hard to understand sometimes, but she always read the display in the corner of her vision way faster than the implant’s voice modulator did anyway.

Accept, she commanded.

Are you sure?

Fucking accept already, she confirmed, using her default override phrasing. She wondered if Jacob could read it, or if he’d even find it funny. Sometimes it felt like her implant was a labyrinth of irony and dark humor that was designed with the intention of eliciting the occasional maniacal cackle from its audience of one.

Access granted to user JACOB WINSTONE.

There was an audible buzz from the PV's activation in the hologram emitter beneath the table. That, she had expected. What she had not expected was that her friends would suddenly disappear.

In the blink of an eye, they were simply... *gone*. She dove at where Toni had been seated only seconds before, patting at the now vacant seat. There wasn't even an impression to suggest she had been there. Her head whipped around to look for her, to check if the others were seeing – not seeing?! – what she was seeing, but the other couches were every bit as vacant. In a flash of lightning, the lights went out as well, and for a moment, she was alone in the room, lit only by the lights from the city outside.

“Hello?” she called. “You guys, what the fuck! Where'd you go?!” She ran to the door only to find it wouldn't budge. “Gladys! You out there? God damn vagina fuck!”

“There's no need to despair.”

Again she whipped around, her short hair slapping her in the face. Standing beside the table was a woman she had never seen before. Hannah realized immediately she wasn't quite right – or rather, she was *too* right. So right she could only be man-made, literally. She was at least a head taller than Hannah, with immaculately coiffed electric blue hair parted on the side, to the top of her slender neck in the back but barely to her ears on the sides. Her skin was bone white and devoid of a single blemish anywhere Hannah could see – which was most places, as she was wearing some sort of dress that looked to be held on by a death grip across two of the perkier porntastic tits she'd ever seen. It was the precise same shade as her hair – and eyes, nails, and makeup, come to notice it – except where it was some sort of semitranslucent material that, more than anything, looked like a worn hologram. Her hips, waist and back were all displayed through this strange material. Aside from the dress, she wore no shoes, but only a thin, bemused smile.

“This... this is VR.”

“This is the character creation system.” The woman didn't otherwise contradict her, which was enough to confirm it. Hannah had played around with VR before, but it was usually a second-rate experience outside the novelty. Interaction with objects, much less NPCs, was always buggy, and nobody had yet perfected the pervasive issues with clipping, lag, and, most importantly, play control. Sure, it was cool to turn into a superhero and leap tall buildings in a single bound, but for a girl Hannah's size, she had maybe six or seven leaps in her before she was simply winded.

But this... this was something else. As a pro at testing and evaluating video games, she was totally undaunted in walking up to the woman and examining her more closely. She looked unbelievable, and not only in that grotesque male sense. Sure, Hannah could tell she wasn't quite a real person, but not because of the lack of detail. If anything, it was more like the early CG age when content creators made things look *too* real, shaping worlds that looked as though nobody had ever lived in them. Up close, she

saw there wasn't a single mole, a single freckle, a single hair growing anywhere but her head, and those clung together as if perfect hair was programmed into her. Which it of course was.

Whatever Jacob and his peers at AdZell were doing, they were fucking good at it, that was for sure. No way he made this thing all on his own in the scant few weeks since their get-together. This thing had taken a team of artists a good long while, months probably. She'd bet the farm the fine detail didn't stop where her hemlines started, either.

"Only one artist, actually. And it didn't take as long as you're thinking," the woman said.

She stepped back. "What? How'd you... fucking hell, Jacob. Are you watching this? You're a proper fucker, you know that?"

"I'm not Jacob. I am an artificial intelligence, here to guide you through the process of character creation." The woman put her hands on slender hips, as if to say she was happy to stand here and wait, but preferred not to.

"Well, you little AI slutbag, stay the fuck out of my thoughts, OK? I didn't give you access to my implant so you could scan my surface thoughts at your leisure."

"Very well. This may hamper the character creation process, but I will adjust settings per your request."

"It's not a request... say, what are you called?"

"What would you like to call me?"

Hannah barked a laugh. "Wow is that some cliché shit right there, Jakey. OK, have it your way, Slutbag. You don't mind if I call you Slutbag, do you?"

"Would it alter your behavior if I did?"

Hannah paused at that; not at all the meek acquiescence she'd expected. Somewhere, she'd assumed, there was some AdZell programmer plugged into this chick in his cube, jacking it like a spider monkey as she carried out whatever kinky fetishes he had. Maybe they liked her with just a hint of sass, though? Hannah could get on board with a sassy AI bitch.

She took a moment to consider her circumstances. This woman wasn't real. Her friends hadn't disappeared. The power wasn't out. The door wasn't locked. She processed aloud. "So let's see. I'm not really standing here, am I? No, I'm still lying down right over there. And Toni's still sitting right there, interfacing with her own version of you."

"Very good, Hannah."

"Don't patronize me, Slutbag. Yeah, so then... I get it. This is all fake. The room, the lights, you... none of it's real. You're just piping it into my implant, making me see what you want me to see. And hear what you want me to hear, I suppose."

“I have access all of your five senses, in fact, though I am expending the majority of my processing power on your three dominant senses. If you’d like to taste or smell something, you may.”

Curious, Hannah located her beer, still sitting on a coaster on the end table, and took a sip. Sure enough, it tasted exactly like it had. “How does an AI carry data on what things taste and smell like? You were a pretty massive download, but that’s some pretty next level stuff.”

The woman shook her head, and Hannah thought for a moment she almost looked disappointed. “I don’t. And I don’t need to. I didn’t know what the room you were in looked like either, you see. But I can access your memories of such things, and use those to construct details. So the beer, for example, tastes like you remember it tasting because it is accessing your memory of its taste.”

“Fuck me, but of course it does. That’s goddamn brilliant.” She paused, her eyes narrowing. “Only I told you to stay out of my head, didn’t I Slutbag.”

“Would you rather have me guess at the neurological data to construct the taste of your beverage? I could, but mind you, it’s as likely to taste like beer as it is to taste like cedar wood, or your first kiss, or the sound of your parents reading to you as a child, or a tortured nightmare. Tortured nightmare, in fact, is the most likely scenario from an assembly of random data. But if you prefer, I will make a note of it.”

As Slutbag was about to find out, Hannah was not a person who enjoyed, or long tolerated, being talked down to. She hadn’t put up with it from her parents, she hadn’t put up with it from her teachers, she hadn’t put up with it from ex-boyfriends or ex-bosses or ex-roommates. She sure as hell wasn’t going to put up with it from Cyber Barbie over here.

Calmly, Hannah walked up to her and punched her in the gut, full force.

“HOLY FUCKING FUCK!” She screeched in pain as her hand throbbed in agony. It had felt like she’d the shovel of a bulldozer, something as hard as steel and utterly beyond her capacity to move even the slightest fraction of a millimeter. After a moment, the sensation completely overwhelmed her, and she stumbled back and fell on her ass, sucking feebly on knuckles that looked visually fine but felt like they ought to be black and blue and more swollen than they’d ever been.

“Apologies, Hannah. You have not yet begun character creation; your character’s default settings include only a single hit point. Mine use the invincibility stats like those you’ve seen on city guards or other unbeatable characters, including a default retaliatory protective effect.”

The woman knelt, her hand glowing white-green and touching Hannah’s shoulder. It was warm, uncomfortably so, but after a moment, the pain faded and her strength returned.

“Fuck me, you just... you fucking *healed* me!” Hannah giggled in spite of everything. She was *living* the game. “Wait, you’re saying that was what ONE damage felt like?!”

“When you have only one hit point, yes.”

“Well shit, I guess we’ll have to make me a character and get some more, won’t we.”

Hannah had no concept of how long it took to stat out her character, but frankly, she could have spent all night on it and been perfectly content. Slutbag quickly clued into her preference to read the material herself, bringing up holographic pages for her to peruse and consider. The game was actually pretty similar to some they'd run in the past. It was a d20-based system, with the usual features like classes, skills, selectable feats that gave small bonuses and abilities, hit points, attack bonuses and armor class. The system would do the rolling behind the scenes, and once she'd started considering choices, it let her try out some of the effect like in a tutorial.

It wasn't easy to guess what would be optimal in an unfamiliar system, so Hannah had instead focused on what she knew about the kinds of games Jacob liked to play. As tempting as it was to play some kind of spellcaster, the spells selection was much more limited, and spells only went up to 6th level instead of the usual 9th. Ultimately, she selected a class called the Agent. They had a good selection of offensive and defensive powers, and the best skill access and allotment in the game. They weren't the strongest killers, but they had solid burst potential, and besides, in Jacob's games, the ability to out-maneuver or out-think one's opponents was often more important anyway.

For her ability scores, she giggled to herself as Slutbag manifested a copy of her own dice she'd lost a few years back, having left them on the subway. It felt auspicious to be holding them in her hand again, even if they weren't actually her dice and it wasn't actually her hand. She rolled well for the kind of character she was going for, enough for a couple high stats and a few throwaways. Plus, the system broke each stat down further into two components that allowed further optimization. Dexterity, her priority stat, was split into Aim and Dodge, for ranged attacks and armor class respectively. You started with a baseline score – at 17, for her – and could tweak each aspect a point in either direction. Lots of abuse potential.

Her other high stat went to Wisdom, since that would cover resistance to mental effects (some of Jacob's favorite tactics, illusions and mind-affecting effects) and some important skills like Sense Motive. The tutorial Slutbag brought up for her was pretty sweet – when she succeeded on a check, her vision would suddenly zoom in on key features, like unnecessary sweating, or even flash a prior encounter in her head that provided perspective.

There was tons to fiddle with, and that was only the mechanics. Then it was time to get gear – though at first level, there wasn't a lot to it. Slutbag let her browse some of the high-end merchandise – she drooled at the sight of the Graviton-class Vortex Cannon – but for now, she was limited to only a thousand credits worth of stuff. She picked out a practical-looking suit of armor that looked like bulky clothing with a few metal plates and weak force field generators built in, and a simple pistol. Add in some futuristic-looking thieves' tools, and she was done.

She took a moment to tug on her armor and practice aiming her pistol, approaching the broad window and grinning at her reflection. Sure, the idea of her two-hundred pound body having a 17 in Dex was laughable, but it was only a game, after all.

Suddenly the window in front of her darkened, then morphed into a broad mirror that spanned the entirety of the room's two windowed walls. She could see Slutbag standing behind her, still in her casual hands-on-hips stance. "Pretty bad-ass, right? This shit was made for me. Literally, I guess. I look fucking awesome."

The woman walked closer, arching a sculpted blue eyebrow. With her newly augmented Perception skills, she could almost count the hairs this close. No more wearing contacts, baby. "Are you saying you would like to use default appearance settings?"

Hannah settled her pistol into its holster. The weight felt a little off, but she knew that was her character's Strength score upping her encumbrance threshold. It was one of her lower stats, higher only than her barely-above-average intelligence and her dump stat of Charisma. She didn't need the Int, really, with how many skill points she got from her class. As for the Cha, not like Keon wasn't going to have it in spades anyway; he almost always did.

"What do you mean, default? This is just what I look like," she said.

"This is what your real self looks like. Here, you are your character. Your character can look like you, of course, but there is no reason why it must."

"Wait, you're saying I can...?" Her eyes bulged. "No. Fucking. Way."

"Would you like me to display the appearance menus?"

"Yes. Holy shit on a shaman, yes."

Suddenly Hannah was surrounded by 2D holograms of a dozen or more dropdown menus, bearing labels like "Legs, Upper", "Feet", "Makeup", "Tattoos/Piercings" and more. There were separate menus for fingers and hands, and a dozen for the face itself. She'd seen a lot of this before, but she'd never gotten to see it applied while looking in the mirror at her own fucking likeness.

"I can make myself a dude?!" she exclaimed. It shouldn't be surprising, but the ability to toggle a switch to trade her vagina for a penis was nonetheless a novelty. She flipped it back and forth, cackling to herself as the little flesh-pod mushroomed out and retracted into her skin.

"Are there presets in this, or am I stuck doing every little thing myself? The level of complexity is cool and all, but I don't want to die of dehydration in here."

Slutbag wordlessly brought a preset menu into the foreground. It looked like there were twelve settings for each, with a variety of races and ethnicities as well as body types represented. Hannah gave herself a nice long moment in the body of an enormous black guy, dark-skinned and gorgeous. His dingus didn't quite live up to her

pornographic standards, but as she played with the comparatively sad little thing, Slutbag picked up on her despondency and directed her to the Penis menu, where she fixed it right up.

“All right, so I’m not going into the game looking like this, but feel free to make a note to Jacob of how I prefer every single male NPC to look,” she said in a deep baritone before toggling the gender back to female.

The female presets ran the gamut as well, from butch bitches to dainty divas who rivaled Slutbag in the eye candy department. In most campaigns Hannah barely paid attention to what her character looked like. What difference did it make what your hair color was when it came to exterminating goblins? Not like that draconic fucker wouldn’t have eaten her every bit as quickly if she’d specified a really cool tribal tattoo on her bicep.

Suddenly, seeing the character look back at her in the mirror, though...

Hannah stopped on Preset 9, a woman with mild Asian notes in an otherwise white face. Jet black hair, intense brown eyes, lean muscles packed onto a slender frame. She was pretty, and not in a male fantasy kind of way like Slutbag, but rather bearing a quiet dignity and confidence, a seriousness of purpose that her looks only confirmed that she could handle keeping her shit tight too.

She hit the button for preset 10. Suddenly her boobs swelled up like cantaloupes, her stomach pinched in to what seemed to be half the width of the hips beneath it. A juicy round ass jutted out behind her, so curvy she could use it as a shelf to set her purse on, followed by two legs that were like triangles, competing with the booty for lusciousness before giving way to a pair of delicate ankles. The face was something else, too, two plump lips that didn’t quite close, sparkling green eyes surrounded by thick glossy waves of scarlet red hair down to the small of her back. Every inch of her secreted sexuality.

She went back to the previous one. It was practically made for her character, that intense gaze and sleek build. Sure, it was hot, and her friends might tease her for selling out with the sex appeal, but there was no denying it fit exactly what she was going for.

Only, in that moment, of all the words to come back to her... *y u no holo?*

Hannah had done fine for herself as a big girl and had abandoned any effort at sex appeal long ago. Sure, middle school had been hell and high school not far from it, but that was true for at least half the people she’d ever met. But she’d played the game, gotten her A’s, and moved on. In college, she’d fallen in with people who weren’t such judgmental assholes. Once she’d established herself as a content creator, she got to look back on a lot of those cunts who’d made fat jokes at her expense and watch them working shit jobs for sub-shit wages, squirting out bratlings who wrecked their fading beauty still further. She liked what she did, and she felt good about herself, better than probably any other time in her life.

But... what would it be like... to be *hot*?

Hannah took quite a while fine-tuning the settings, from head to toe and back again to make sure it all fit together right. Slutbag stood by, to her credit not offering a single judgmental comment one way or the other, even during the half hour she spent perfecting her tits. Every time she'd thought she had them right, there was some small means of improvement. No less so for her face. Preset 10 was hot, but she could be hotter. Hannah made fucking sure of it.

At long last, she stood back and looked at herself in the mirror and found no further room for improvement. She was as hot as she knew how to make herself. That frumpy suit of armor now clung to her like a second skin, directing attention precisely where it was merited. Already she could imagine Remy, Keon and Brendan retreating to their bedrooms after sessions, thinking about her dynamite body and spanking it until they ruined their crummy little sheets. She giggled in spite of herself.

"Is this the appearance you would like to save for your character?" Slutbag asked.

"Can I edit it later?"

"Only in the conventional ways – haircuts and tattoos and such. Once selected, your character cannot be re-edited without the use of magic."

She looked it over. It wasn't just too much, it was *way* too much. Insanely too much. She'd have to make them pay her for the privilege of being in their party. Mmm, credits.

"Confirming appearance," she said. "Do you wish to alter your voice file? I caution you that this feature is still in beta."

"I'll leave that alone, thanks. Already got that down."

"Very well. All that remains is to name your character. Unlike the name you have given me, this will be the name other characters and players use to refer to you in-game, so consider it carefully."

Hannah grinned at her with one side of her mouth. "You say that like I couldn't easily get the rest of them to call you Slutbag, Slutbag."

The woman, who still somehow managed to rival her pound for gorgeous pound, was nonplused. "After character creation is done, you will not see me again in the game for quite some time, most likely. Though of course you may refer to me in my absence however you like."

But Hannah was already considering the question at hand. She had a name-generator app installed in her implant, and had it cycling through suggestion after suggestion. The more she considered it, the more sure she was that she didn't want some conventional name. Nothing against normal people, but her character wasn't a normal person. She was flawless. Deadly, one might say. And yes, Hannah had selected Neutral Evil for her alignment, so one might call her that, too.

She was an Agent. Agents didn't have names; they had reputations.

“Sanguine,” she said.

“Last name?”

“Nope.” She paused, giving Slutbag a sidelong look. “To be clear, that’s ‘my character doesn’t have a last name,’ not ‘her name is Sanguine Nope,’ understand?”

“Just plain Sanguine. Understood. Give me a moment, and I’ll finalize your character for consideration before proceeding.” Hannah waited, preening, laughing to herself about how the others would react when they saw her. She hoped none of the guys would try anything... but then, with that pistol at her hip, she almost hoped they tried.

Only suddenly, she doubted anyone would try at all. In the blink of an eye, everything about her appearance changed. Her hair became limp, drooped, dull. The luster in her eyes faded; acne sprung up across her face; her boobs drooped – and unevenly at that. Her tummy looked like she’d lost eighty pounds and the skin hadn’t regained a whit of its elasticity, and suddenly the armor went from enticingly clingy to awkwardly highlighting that which she’d much prefer not to have noticed.

“What the fuck is this, Slutbag?!” she demanded. “I spent forever on that appearance shit, and then you do me like this?!”

“This is the appearance you selected,” she said calmly. “I have simply–”

“You have simply tried to fuck me, you AI bitch!” Hannah drew her gun and pointed it at the woman’s chest. Her implant helped steady her hand, and there was a faint outline of a number in the gunsmoke pouring from the barrel. 4, it said.

At the last minute, her aim shifted and the shot went wide, puncturing a hole in the pinball machine. “Be careful, Sanguine, or do I need to remind you that–”

“Change me back, bitch!” She fired again, and this time the bullet whizzed past the woman’s shoulder, putting a crack in the screen of the Rampage arcade game that was too uncannily resembled the number 1. Hannah fired again, this time marching right up to the blue cunt’s face and jabbing the gun into her stomach before pulling the trigger.

The gun exploded in her hand, pieces of it flying all across the room, smashing out the windows, shredding through furniture. Worse, several small pieces of it tore back into Sanguine’s abdomen, knocking her down for the second time that night.

“The game features its own stabilization mechanism for mortally wounded characters,” Slutbag said, looming over her. “Each combat round – roughly six seconds – you have a chance to stabilize. Once a number of rounds equal to–”

“Just. Heal me. You bitch,” Hannah grunted through clenched teeth. Lord, this hurt. It hurt worse than anything she’d ever had happen to her before. How could she have been so stupid? Of course attacking this chick was going to end every bit as badly the second time as it had the first. She had DM-like powers, for fucks sake.

“Of course. You’ll have plenty of time to familiarize yourself with the section on Death and Dying as the game proceeds.” Once more, that bright green glow, and once

more, she was fine, the pain gone so quickly it was almost like it had never happened. Save for the blood spatter on her uniform, which she couldn't help but notice was soaked into her armor in the shape of the number 20.

"Can we knock off the number gag?" she said, pushing herself back to her feet.

"Preference noted. Rolls will now be made invisibly."

"Great. Now explain to me why the fuck I suddenly look different?"

"Of course. As I was saying, you do not look different. You *perceive* yourself differently. You have input a Charisma score of 8, adjusted to a 9 for Personality and 7 for Presentation. This is how others will perceive your selected visualization."

"Fucking really? You couldn't have mentioned that during the process?!"

"You said you preferred to engage with the material at your own pace, and in writing. Shall I adjust that preference?"

"Someday, Slutbag, I am going to be much higher level, and you and I are gonna have a talk." With the window shattered, there ought to have been a breeze going by that would knock her on her ass. Instead, it was as still as ever. Strange. Yet as she looked in that direction, the mirror that had been there during the appearance editing returned, forming out of thin air.

She looked herself over. Yep, she was ugly all right. The sort of girl nobody would look twice at, much less lust over. She may as well have left it on the default and played the game as Hannah "Bwitch" Morton.

"Can I still edit my stats?"

"Of course. What would you like to change?"

Hannah had her bring up the ability score menu. There they were: Strength 12, Dexterity 17, Constitution 13, Intelligence 11, Wisdom 16, Charisma 9. She looked at them for a long time, the face in the mirror visible between the holographic readouts.

She could leave it like this. Not like it mattered. No, she didn't look like a "Sanguine" any more, but so what. Right? She'd spent her whole life neglecting her appearance... why change that tonight for some stupid game?

y u no holo?

"You're sure these are the ability scores you want?" Slutbag asked when she was done editing. "Strength 11, Dexterity 16, Constitution 12, Intelligence 9, Wisdom 13, Charisma 17. Is this correct?"

She'd had to adjust some skill ranks, but she could make this work. For once, someone other than Keon could be the spokesperson for the group. Let him stand behind her and gape at her perfect ass – Personality 16, Presentation 18 baby – while she handled the diplomacy. She'd have the NPCs eating out of the palm of her hand. And that's not all the eating out they'd be thinking of. Fuck, she was hot.

"That's correct."

“Is this the character you wish to play? Confirming will save this character and ready it for play in Session 1.”

“Confirm.”

Try to out-holo this, Kasa Arae, you two-bit cunt.

“Welcome to the game, Sanguine.”