

STONE'S THROW FROM HELL

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. PARRADICE CITY LIMITS - DAY

In the distance, we see a futuristic, exotic city. A vast lake, Lake Unwieldy; a mountain-castle hybrid, the Transcendent City Center of Parradice; and the planet's most intricate, challenging golf course, the Parradice Royal & Mystical Golf Course, perfectly integrated into and winding through the entire settlement, rising and plummeting fairways that blaze through the space like a giant amusement park, dominate the city.

In FG is a sign:

*"Parradice -- a perfect city on an imperfect planet"*

On the tee of the first hole, a marathon par nine spiraling upward on a network of metal support beams anchored into the bottom of Lake Unwieldy, and ending with a four-tiered green SHAPED LIKE A HEART, TWO MEN (20'S) are about to start their round.

STRYKER TEMPLETON -- brimming with naive optimism, athletic build, exuberant aura of boundless energy -- lines up his tee shot.

Peering on is his best friend, ORLAND SANDS -- loves outer beauty, chunky build, thinks his presence in Parradice is much deserved.

ORLAND

Wind's blowing a bit toward the right rough. I'd aim a little left of center.

STRYKER

That's exactly what I'm doing.

He rears back and BLASTS a bomb down the fairway.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Ah nuts, I started it off right down the middle.

ORLAND

Yep, the wind's taking it towards the trees on the right.

Despite Stryker's body English, his ORANGE AND WHITE BALL ends up in the midst of a copse of trees with TEAL and NAVY-BLUE leaves.

Stryker's golf bag, which is actually a *bot*, short for robot, named UCAD, springs to life. The three-foot tall rectangle of the latest technology has a built-in computer, keyboard and monitor, along with a navigational system for the real, non-computing world. Three golf clubs -- adjustable wood, adjustable hybrid and putter -- are stored in titanium tubes attached to the bot's right side.

UCAD

Oh boy, you dropped the ball on that one. Not even my expert caddying skills can salvage a par on this hole.

Bot shakes his head in resignation. Stryker drops the driver into its holder.

STRYKER

Don't throw up a white flag yet, my friend. There's a slight opening in the trees I can get through.

Bot emits a ROBOTIC LAUGH.

UCAD

Hope springs eternal in Parradice.

The three STRIDE down the fairway toward the drives.

EXT. PARRADICE ROYAL & MYSTICAL GOLF COURSE - CONTINUOUS

Stryker, with hybrid club in hand, stands two strides behind his ball. He squints at the opening in the trees.

STRYKER

Ucad, I want you go twenty paces straight ahead, right on a line that leads back onto the middle of the fairway. Then turn around to face me. I need a target.

UCAD

Please clarify distance. Bots do not pace.

STRYKER

Sorry, I meant twenty short standard land units, commonly abbreviated SSLU's.

UCAD

Thank you for that clarification.

STRYKER

I'm going to try to hit a low but rising shot that will miss the branches before steadily climbing and ending up on the fairway two-hundred and twenty SSLU's away.

UCAD

Surely you are joking. A mis-struck shot could easily hit me in a vulnerable, potentially damaging location.

STRYKER

You're only a bot. In the unlikely event I don't hit it where I'm aiming, any damage done can be fixed. Now get your robotic ass, and the rest of you, up there.

Ucad STARES at him for TWO BEATS, then moves ahead.

ORLAND

You have to fix his communications-style setup. Then you won't have all that back talk.

STRYKER

I'll look at it after the round.

Ucad stops at the requested spot. Stryker lines up the shot.

UCAD

Permission to, immediately after the club face meets the ball, enter into Chameleon mode.

STRYKER

(Laughing)

What are you going to blend into?

UCAD

You shall see.

Stryker shakes his head in amusement, lines up the shot, and WHACKS THE BALL. Ucad's body comes apart, the four walls that make up his rectangular torso fall to the ground. Beams of light that change from WHITE to THE EXACT SHADE OF GREEN UP ON WHICH HIS FALLEN BOT BODY LIES cover his collapsed body. The robot is now indistinguishable from the ground upon which he lies.

Stryker WHOOPS with delight. The shot flies through the air and comes to rest in the middle of the fairway two-hundred twenty-seven SSLU's away.

ORLAND

Well done, my friend. You really should consider trying out for the Planetary Professionals Tour.

STRYKER

No thank you. I'm ready to explore other parts of the planet, especially political and religious systems different than ours.

They stride toward Ucad.

ORLAND

I can't believe you want to leave Parradice.

STRYKER

It's great here, I mean what with the lifelong financial security from being government employees who can rotate jobs anytime they want among the brewery and golf course --

He looks over to where he deduces Ucad must be.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

It's safe to get up now, Ucad.

In a BLURRY WHIR of high-speed self-assembly, Ucad is back to his normal form.

UCAD

Thank you. How did the shot go?

STRYKER

Splendid, thanks in part to your willingness to be a target.

UCAD

I knew you'd come through.

Stryker turns back to Orland as they continue toward Orland's ball farther ahead in the left rough.

STRYKER

Anyway, it's wonderful here. We can play golf every day, work as much, or little, as we want, and still have access to the universal bank account of Parradice. We have access to the most respected university and revered churches on the planet and the collection literature and artworks in our museum system is second to none.

They arrive at Orland's ball.

ORLAND

But?

STRYKER

But I want to see, for myself, what people and governments and religions are like in other parts of the world. I don't know, I'm bored with perfection, I guess.

Orland glances at the grass around his ball, then at Ucad.

ORLAND

Four point six five hybrid, please.

Bot presses switch on the club. The shaft LENGTHENS. Bot presses another switch. The club face CHANGES ANGLE. Ucad hands the club to Orland.

UCAD

Knock yourself out, I mean knock the ball out of the park.

ORLAND

Wrong sport, killer.

(to Stryker)

You really need to fix his communications software.

STRYKER

I like a bot with spunk, up to a point.

Orland HARUMPHS. He lines up and hits the shot. He GROANS. Orland's topped shot barely makes it out of the rough. Orland SLAMS the club into the tube attached to Ucad.

ORLAND

If you would have adjusted the angle of the club face properly, my shot would have turned out better.

UCAD

There's no strategy to offset incompetence.

ORLAND

Listen you pile of moving metal, there's plenty of room in the Sea of Radiance for another obsolete bot.

STRYKER

Settle down, my friend. It's just one shot. It's a long hole. You'll be fine.

They proceed to Orland's ball.

ORLAND

Straight three-wood.

Ucad changes club to meet the request. Orland takes the club from bot's titanium arm.

He addresses the ball, and begins his back swing. A stranger appears from out of the woods on the right side of the hole. He runs right at them YELLING. Orland stops his swing.

ORLAND (CONT'D)

Who in the devil is that?

STRYKER

I have no idea. But I think he's yelling 'help me, help me'.

The stranger, WIELAND C. NOSUN -- 50's, skeletal body and limbs, green eyes huge with fear, wearing gray jumpsuit two sizes too big -- holds up one hand, then leans over and puts both hands on his knees as he catches his breath.

Finally he stands up straight.

WIELAND

Please sirs, help me. I beg of you, help me find a place to hide.

STRYKER

Why do you need to hide?



WIELAND

I have been a slave since birth in the Flawless Golfing Technology factory here in Parradice.

STRYKER

What? That's crazy.

WIELAND

I can assure you it's true. Factory makes golf equipment -- clubs, balls, shoes, tees, gloves, and special-order items like T-shirts and golf carts.

ORLAND

I know what they make. They're famous around the galaxy as the best golf products company. As for your claim, that's plain insane. Policing agents would have found out about it by now. It'd be all over the news media.

Wieland looks all around the area, his eyes dart to and fro.

WIELAND

That's because the company, with the government's help, hide the slave operations down in a subterranean level. I heard from other slaves that there are similar operations in the island colonies.

UCAD

That would explain the missing-population claims by various people throughout history.

ORLAND

That's a fallacy started by people in other countries who're upset they are not one of the chosen ones able to live in the world's most perfect city.

STRYKER

Yes, that must be the case. To think our government would imprison many thousands --

UCAD (V.O.)(V.O.)  
 (Interrupting)  
 Some estimates put the figure at  
 one point two five million.

Stryker GLARES at the bot.

STRYKER  
 Whatever. To think our government  
 would do something like that is  
 ludicrous.

Seven UNIFORMED POLICING AGENTS (mixed ages) with laser guns  
 mounted in the middle of their black titanium helmets erupt  
 from the woods on the right. Wieland turns and runs toward  
 the wooded area on the left side of the hole.

POLICING AGENT #1  
 Halt immediately!

Wieland speeds up but the agents gain on him.

POLICING AGENT #1 (CONT'D)  
 Halt or suffer the consequences!

Wieland GASPS for air. Ten SSLU's from the woods, seven  
 searing beams of PURPLE ENERGY hit him in the back of the  
 head and neck. An EXPLOSION OF BONE AND BRAIN MATTER shower  
 down on Wieland as he's dead when he hits the ground.

Stryker and Orland STARE in shocked silence.

INT. PARRADICE POLICING STATION - DAY

Stryker, Orland and Ucad sit in the main reception room of  
 the policing station. A bot resembling AN ATTRACTIVE BLONDE  
 WOMAN in her early 20's sits behind the reception desk.  
 Hallways on either side of the reception desk are lined with  
 doors on both sides of each corridor.

LIEUTENANT KIELL -- 40's, seven feet, crewcut-short jet-black  
 hair, nearly glowing white skin, a female screaming to be a  
 male -- strides up to them.

LIEUTENANT KIELL  
 We're ready to begin the  
 questioning. Follow me.

Stryker and Orland rise.

STRYKER (To Ucad)  
 You stay here. Go into Chameleon  
 mode until we get back.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

No, the bot comes along.

STRYKER

You want to question my bot?

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Yes.

She STRIDES down the left-hand hallway. The trio follow Kiell past several closed doors. Kiell stops. Doors on both sides of the hallway open. Policing agents stand in both doorways.

Kiell POINTS at Ucad and Orland.

LIEUTENANT KIELL (CONT'D)

The bot goes into that room  
 (Points to the left)  
 and the human  
 (Points to the right)  
 in that one.

She turns to Stryker.

LIEUTENANT KIELL (CONT'D)

You keep following me.

They pass by seven more sets of doors. Kiell stops at the eighth one. She bends over and STARES into an optical reader that scans her right eyeball. Door unlocks. She SHOVES the door open.

LIEUTENANT KIELL (CONT'D)

Right this way.

Stryker enters the room.

INT. POLICING STATION INTERVIEW ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is a PERFECT CIRCLE. As Stryker steps across the threshold, a CHAIR RISES UP from a hidden compartment in the floor. As Kiell enters, another chair, four feet from first, does the same.

The lieutenant closes the door. Right after the door shuts, a TABLE RISES UP from the floor, separating the two chairs.

A microphone DROPS DOWN from the ceiling.

Kiell MOTIONS for Stryker to sit. She takes the other chair.

STRYKER

I had no idea the Policing Station was so big. I mean crime around here is almost unheard of.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Less than two percent of this space is ours. We share this facility with Border Integrity Protection Services. They're responsible not only for Parradice proper but also the twelve Island Colonies.

STRYKER

Sure, sure, everyone wants to reach Parradice but only a hundred thousand and one, give or two a few hundred, can live in the Holy City.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

That's right. So tell me Mr. Templeton, what did the mental patient say to you before he was, ah, before he perished while fleeing from my officers?

STRYKER

I wasn't aware he was a mental patient. He said he was a slave in a secret government-run factory underneath the regular Flawless Golfing Technology Products factory.

Kiell LAUGHS HUMORLESSLY.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Oh my, he was even more delusional than the doctors thought. No, Mr. Nosun was a paranoid schizophrenic who escaped from a psychiatric-care facility in Parradice.

Stryker FROWNS CONFUSION.

STRYKER

I wasn't aware we had that kind of institution here. I mean, who has emotional or psychological issues in Parradice?

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Nearly all of the patients are from other parts of the planet.

(MORE)

LIEUTENANT KIELL (CONT'D)

As you know, Parradice University has a top-notch medical school. It only made sense to set up a hospital here in the city. Due to the nature of the condition of the patients, the hospital maintains a rather low profile.

Stryker nods his agreement.

STRYKER

Sure. I was a premed student so I'm familiar with the school's reputation. But I don't recall any of my psychiatry profs saying anything about a mental health facility here in Parradice.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Some things you don't learn in school. What else did this mentally unhinged man say?

STRYKER

He said he had been a slave since birth and that he'd heard from other slaves that there were secret slave camps hidden under other Flawless Golfing Technology Products factories in the Parradice colonies.

Kiell smiles condescendingly.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

It figures. Those paranoid schizophrenics think there's evil people everywhere.

STRYKER

Right. But I don't see why your officers lasered an unarmed man to death. The man was running away, he wasn't posing a threat to anyone. Why didn't the officers just shoot him in the leg or foot?

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Because the patient told his doctors that in order to protect himself against all the people out to get him, he was going to get a weapon.

(MORE)

LIEUTENANT KIELL (CONT'D)

He wasn't specific about how or where he was going to obtain a weapon, but that was his intent.

STRYKER

But if he had a weapon, why didn't he try to use it? He ran. With his back to your seven policing agents, there was no way he was planning to shoot at them.

Kiell PEERS at him, then SHRUGS her unfeminine shoulders.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Perhaps the fugitive had a weapon, perhaps not. It's a risk our officers did not want to take. In order to protect the fine citizens of Parradice from lunatics, deadly force is occasionally necessary.

STRYKER

I see.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Did the man say anything else?

STRYKER

No.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

That's all the questions I have.

STRYKER

So I'm free to go?

Kiell nods 'yes'. Stryker starts to get up. Kiell's driver-length right arm FLASHES across the table, her hand on his wrist.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

If the media questions you about this, I would not mention the crazy man's delusional ramblings about secret slave factories.

He looks down at her oversized hand, the long black-polished fingernails digging into the back of his hand.

LIEUTENANT KIELL (CONT'D)

It would only give the bored intellectuals an excuse to break into the Flawless Golfing Technology Products factory in search of the nonexistent subterranean slave operation.

STRYKER

People have actually done that?

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Several have tried to do it. The factory's security system detects the intrusion. Security notifies us and detains the misguided soul until a policing agent arrives. It's a nuisance. We have to file police reports, suspect gets an attorney, the city prosecutor's office gets involved, and so on.

He tries to stand up. Kiell moves her hand from Stryker's hand to his right wrist.

STRYKER

Ease up with claw hold. That hurts.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Don't forget what I said.

Kiell releases him. Stryker PEERS at his wrist as he stands up. He heads toward the door.

LIEUTENANT KIELL (CONT'D)

One more thing.

STRYKER

What?

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Have a nice day in Parradice.

EXT. PARRADICE ROYAL & MYSTICAL GOLF COURSE - DAY

Stryker and Orland, with Ucad motoring behind, play the second hole.

It's a four-hundred twenty-five-SSLU par four. The second shot must clear the planet's largest sand hazard, which takes up the last one-hundred seventy SSLU's of the hole.

DANCING around in the middle of the sand trap is a woman known as THE SAINT OF THE SANDS.

She enters trances, dances around in the sand, and later interprets the markings. Her UNNAMED ASSISTANT -- 50's, female, brown tunic -- PLAYS a flute-like instrument.

Orland eyes his approach shot.

ORLAND

Ucad, I need a six point five seven  
five hybrid iron, please.

Bot presses one switch, then another, on the club. He hands it to Orland.

ORLAND (CONT'D)

Any helpful hints, Ucad?

UCAD

Don't hit the saint in the sand.

ORLAND

Smart ass.

He lines up the shot. The saint and her assistant are a hundred SSLU's away, directly between him and the flag stick.

ORLAND (CONT'D)

(Yelling)

Hey your saint-ness and the  
assistant there, watch yourselves.

Saint keeps on DANCING, assistant continues making MUSIC.

STRYKER

Why do you bother warning them?  
They never listen to anyone while  
she's in her trances.

ORLAND

I don't want the death or serious  
injury of a saint on my conscience  
if I bury a shot in her skull.

STRYKER

Ah, so you're more worried about  
your feelings than her well-being.

ORLAND

I'm equally concerned about both.

Stryker smiles. Ucad makes a STIFLED LAUGHTER sound. Orland ignores them and hits a shot that FLIES HIGH and STRAIGHT.



STRYKER

The women are safe. I think you're going to like that shot.

Ball lands just past Stryker's ball (on the green), rolls, and STOPS two club-lengths from the hole.

ORLAND

Praise Imall, that's where I want to be.

Stryker puts his right hand on Ucad's left shoulder.

STRYKER

Want to try out the new hardware?

UCAD

Do I have a choice?

STRYKER

Not really.

UCAD

Very well. Here goes something more than nothing, Imall willing.

A small rotor blade EMERGES from the top of the bot's head. It SPINS around extremely fast. Ucad spreads his arms. Thrusters appear under his outstretched arms. Bot RISES off the ground. Stryker GRABS Ucad's left arm.

STRYKER

See you on the other side.

He and the bot rise up and FLY above the two women. The saint, taking a breather from dancing, sits cross-legged on the sand. Her assistant takes video of the latest markings.

STRYKER

(TO WOMEN) (CONT'D)

Ladies, how are we doing?

Saint of the Sands looks up, grabs a PLACARD and turns it toward Stryker: TALK TO THE SAND. Stryker smiles.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

If I knew what language it spoke, I would. Good luck with the readings.

Bot descends and the two land on the far side of sand trap. SOUND OF SAXOPHONE comes out of Ucad.

UCAD

You have incoming voice-message-system call from an unknown contact. Do you wish to answer?

STRYKER

Yes. Put them on hologram.

The image of KENT MURRAY -- 20's, clean-shaven, glasses -- appears in 3-D above Ucad.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Hello.

KENT (V.O.)

Are you Stryker Templeton?

STRYKER

I am. Who are you?

KENT (V.O.)

I am Kent Murray of the Parradice Sentinel. I'm the Sentinel's newest senior reporter. You've probably read some of my stories.

They reach the green. Bot hands putter to Stryker.

STRYKER

Sure. I really liked your three-part piece on the evolution of Parradice's role in saving ecosystems in developing countries.

KENT (V.O.)

Thank you. Listen, I see you're in the middle of a round but I need to ask you a few questions about the fatal shooting you witnessed.

Stryker glances back toward the tee.

STRYKER

Sure. Fire away, I mean go ahead.

KENT (V.O.)

I've already spoken to Lieutenant Kiell and her boss, Captain Phillips. So I know this Wieland Nosun was an escaped mental patient. My question is what did he say to you?

Orland CLEARS HIS THROAT. Stryker looks over at Orland as the latter mouths 'nothing' and then puts index finger in front of his mouth.

STRYKER

Ah, well, not much, really. He just said he was lost and was, looking for his mother. And then he started speaking gibberish and making sounds like an animal.

Kent LAUGHS.

KENT (V.O.)

So he acted like the lunatic the police agents say he was.

STRYKER

Exactly.

KENT (V.O.)

That's pretty much all I need to know. Thanks for your time.

STRYKER

You're welcome, Mr. Murray. Say, before you go, I have a question for you. What do you know about the missing population theory?

KENT (V.O.)

It's a crackpot theory that pops up on the PECNET every six or seven Planetary Orbits Around The Sun (POATS). Its few supporters tend to be bored, paranoid intellectuals who can't believe how lucky they have it here in Parradice. Why?

STRYKER

I was talking a friend the other day and he mentioned it in passing.

KENT (V.O.)

I see. Stryker, I appreciate your time. Have a good round.

STRYKER

Thanks.

The holographic image dissolves.

ORLAND

Wise choice. It would have done no good to tell Murray what Wieland really said. It'd only get us in hot water with the police.

Stryker BENDS DOWN to study the line of his putt.

STRYKER

That's right. But if the missing-population-theory was truly a crazy idea with no validity, the policing agents wouldn't care that I told the media what Wieland said.

ORLAND

Surely you're not saying you believe this crazy government-conspiracy nonsense.

Stryker prepares to putt.

STRYKER

I don't know what I believe. I need more of the story but I'm not going to get it from the police. So I'm going to talk to someone else.

ORLAND

Who?

STRYKER

God.

He RAPS his putt toward the hole.

INT. TRANSCENDENT CITY CENTER OF PARRADICE - NIGHT

The six members of the Council Of Six, led by IAN BLACKHART -- looks 25 but really much older, dazzling blue eyes, coal-black skin, six foot, no discernible body fat, arrogant smile. He wears an AMULET WITH THREE SNAKES WRAPPED AROUND MAGIC CANE from his neck.

A MALE REPORTER (25) and CAMERAWOMAN (29) from the Parradice Sentinel look on from one end of the black stone table.

BARBARA ROTHSCHILD -- 50's, elegant and thoughtful face, BLACK and PURPLE hair in intricate do, skintight pant suit with plunging neckline -- has the floor.

BARBARA

I know the Celestial Tablets clearly state the population of Parradice proper is not to exceed one-hundred thousand and one. However, I don't believe our god Imall meant that number couldn't ever change.

DAFULT MANN -- 40's, unremarkable air, receding white hairline, reading glasses -- SHAKES HIS HEAD in disagreement.

DAFULT

The Celestial Tablets' message is sacred and timeless. It matters not how much human time has transpired. Imall decreed that Parradice was the most holy space on the planet. A crucial part of that sacred space is limiting the number of believers allowed the privilege and honor of living in Parradice.

Ian nods neutrally.

IAN

We will continue discussing Miss Rothschild's intriguing yet potentially controversial proposal at the next meeting. Thanks to my fellow Council members for attending. As always, the minutes of the meeting will be posted on the Council Of Six PECNET site.

Everyone gets to their feet. The reporter and camerawoman WAVE their thanks to Ian Blackhart. He smiles back.

The two Sentinel people exit through the room's public-access door. Ian walks over to the table and presses a button built into the stone. A loud LOCKING NOISE follows.

Blackhart CLAPS his hands together.

IAN (CONT'D)

Alright, let's get down to the real business of Parradice.

They all take their seats.

INT. TRANSCENDENT CITY CENTER OF PARRADICE - NIGHT

Ian looks around the room.

IAN

You all agree we have to do this?

Others NOD 'yes' except for Barbara.

BARBARA

There must be some other way to address this problem.

IAN

If you have a different idea, I'd love to hear it.

BARBARA

I can't think of anything right now. Something this drastic should be reviewed and analyzed, the pros and cons thoroughly explored --

IAN

(Interrupting)

Barbara, there simply isn't time. This is not merely a problem. It is a crisis. We cannot afford anymore incidents like the Wieland fiasco. If we fail to take action, there will inevitably be another escape.

DAFULT

As radical as the idea first appears, I have to agree with Ian.

BARBARA

I can't go along with it.

IAN

I can understand your position but you are outnumbered. Round one of the eliminations will begin next week. Alright, meeting's adjourned. It is time to relax and enjoy ourselves down in the Sacred Stories Room.

He pushes another button on the table. A hidden Vertical Relocation Unit (VRU) door MATERIALIZES on the rear wall. The council members hop up and head for the open door.

EXT. PARRADICE ROYAL & MYSTICAL GOLF COURSE - DAY

Stryker, Orland and Ucad walk off 2nd green. Orland keeps walking toward tee of the third hole. Stryker stops.

STRYKER

Hold on, Orland. We need to talk.

ORLAND

About what?

STRYKER

About what we should do about  
Wieland's death.

Orland trudges back to Stryker, glares at him.

ORLAND

There's nothing to do. The poor,  
crazy man's dead. Police shot him.  
End of story.

STRYKER

No, that's the end of our knowledge  
of the real story. Lieutenant  
Kiell, and the Parradice Policing  
Department, are hiding something. I  
need to tell someone about it. The  
only people I feel safe discussing  
this with, other than you two, is  
the church.

ORLAND

So you're going to tell the Holy  
Leader of Imall's Church of Seven  
Pillars you think the Parradice  
Policing Department is a bunch of  
liars and murderers?

STRYKER

I'll be more diplomatic than that.  
I don't exactly what I'm going to  
say but I'll think of something.

ORLAND

What about our round of golf?

STRYKER

I'll call you after I'm done at the  
church.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(To Ucad)

Come on, we're going to church.

UCAD

Need a lift?

STRYKER

Nah, it's not that far.

He angles toward the church. Ucad motors after him.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO CHURCH OF SEVEN PILLARS - DAY

Stryker and Ucad approach a soaring, sprawling brick and stone building. A row of STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS above the double stone doors spells out seven pillars of faith: "honesty, integrity, courage, love, sacrifice, devotion, and praise".

Stryker looks toward the stone carving of Imall at very top of the church, closes his eyes and proceeds to kneel on left knee. He opens eyes, stands up and looks at Ucad.

STRYKER

I'd have you come inside with me  
but the church considers bots to be  
like pets, which aren't allowed in  
the church.

UCAD

But love is one of pillars of the  
church. That's not showing much  
love toward bots.

STRYKER

You see, what the church is saying  
is that, ah, well hell, I can't  
defend the church on this point. I  
think their bot stance is outdated  
and just plain wrong.

He looks around to make sure no one heard him.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

But since I can't change their  
stance, at least not right now,  
we're going to have to accept it.  
So while I'm inside, I want you to  
go into chameleon. Don't make any  
computations but be alert.

UCAD

Alert for what?

STRYKER

Anything that happens around you.

The bot looks around, does three sixty, then stares at Stryker.



STRYKER (CONT'D)

I know there's not much, all right,  
there's nothing going on out here  
right now but you never know.

UCAD

Right.

The bot zips over to a stone bench twenty SSLU's to the left of the entrance. A putter-length high cactus plant juts up on the bench's right edge. Ucad changes color to match the shade of the cacti, breaks itself down into tiny components, and drops onto the cactus plant. A TINY GREEN LIGHT, like a human eye, twinkles from valley between two spikes.

STRYKER

Nice job.

He enters the church.

INT. CHURCH OF SEVEN PILLARS - CONTINUOUS

Stryker steps into cavernous, ornate worship area. Pews form a semicircle around raised pulpit. Behind the pulpit, a two-story tapestry showing Imall smiling while flying over the city of Parradice. A small pool with fountain show up geyser of water that changes shape and color every few seconds.

Stryker makes his way over the polished black marble flooring up to the pulpit area. He finds a spot just to the left of the center and kneels down. He stares into the changing, flowing waters of the fountain. Stryker bows head to pray.

He opens eyes and sees CORTLAND ASHES -- 24, sad but hopeful brown eyes, black, revealing clothing -- kneeling a couple SSLU's away.

CORTLAND

Sorry if I bothered you. I can move  
farther away if you'd like.

STRYKER

Oh no, you're fine right there.

CORTLAND

I've seen you at the primary  
worship service but please forgive  
me, I cannot recall your name.

STRYKER

It's Stryker Templeton. And you're  
Cortland Ashes.

(MORE)

STRYKER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about your husband's passing.

CORTLAND

Thank you. It was so sudden and unexpected, such an odd way to die.

STRYKER

He must have been traveling pretty fast for his personal transport unit to explode. I shouldn't talk. I've been known to exceed the speed limit after I've had a few cocktails in the clubhouse after a round of golf gone bad.

Cortland jumps to her feet and takes one giant step over to Stryker. She jabs index finger at Stryker.

CORTLAND

Get this straight. Brook wasn't even close to being intoxicated like that Lieutenant Kiell said.

STRYKER

I'm sorry. It's just that I saw Sentinel story on PECNET with the autopsy results --

CORTLAND

(Interrupting)

Brook's three friends all told me he had two drinks early in the evening and then switched to water, which is what Brook always did when he went to the clubs, which wasn't very often.

STRYKER

What about the coroner's findings?

CORTLAND

The coroner was wrong, I don't know, maybe she's incompetent or maybe the Policing Department pressured her into lying about the results so they could close the case.

STRYKER

That's possible, I suppose.

Cortland backs up a step.

CORTLAND

I'm sorry, you didn't come here to listen to me go on about my dead husband.

STRYKER

Don't worry about it. Us church members have to stick together, right?

Cortland smile, leans over and sets right hand on Stryker's shoulder.

CORTLAND

I couldn't agree more. I know I shouldn't obsess on Brook but it's hard to let go.

STRYKER

I'm sure it is.

CORTLAND

But we all have to move on with our lives whether we want to or not.

She turns and shuffles away from him. Stryker watches her go. Cortland stops and turns toward Stryker.

CORTLAND (CONT'D)

Maybe we can get together for coffee sometime, you know, after the primary worship service.

STRYKER

Yeah, sure, that'd be great.

She smiles, turns and leave the sanctuary. Stryker looks back at the fountain. He presses a button on the iron railing. A HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE OF computer keyboard and monitor appear in front of him.

SUPERIMPOSED on monitor is the church's official seal -- church name with seven pillars of faith surrounding it.

In FG, SUPERIMPOSED over the church seal:

"Greetings and blessings from the Holy Leader of Imall's Church of Seven Pillars. Father Manuel is currently in a meeting with the Church Elders. He can meet with you in person in approximately one point two five standard time units. Otherwise you may communicate in real time with a member of our staff via our PECNET interface.

Stryker rolls his eyes, shakes his head in disgust.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(On computer screen)

I'd prefer to speak with someone in person but I don't want to wait around so I'll settle for the PECNET interface.

On the computer screen:

"Very good. What do you wish to discuss?"

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(On computer screen)

I saw the police kill a man named Wieland Nosun earlier today. Lieutenant Kiell claims the man was an escaped, delusional, dangerous mental patient that the police had no choice but to shoot.

On the computer screen:

"That was an unfortunate, tragic event. The church prays for the victim's troubled soul and for his family and loved ones."

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(On computer screen)

I'll leave the journey of Wieland's soul to him and Imall. What concerns me is that I'm not so ready to dismiss the man's claims about a secret slave factory in Parradice. I'm no psychiatrist but he didn't seem mentally ill to me. He was scared because he feared being captured but he appeared as sane as your average, above-average citizen of Parradice.

On the computer screen:

"Mental illness can take a variety of forms, some of which are more subtle than others. One does not have to be a raving, drooling madman to be mentally unbalanced and potentially dangerous to the general public. Serial killers, for example, appear quite normal most of the time."

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(On computer screen)

That's true but my gut tells me there's something suspicious about the police's story.

(MORE)

STRYKER (CONT'D)

If Wieland's claims about a secret slave factory were so outlandish, then Lieutenant Kiell wouldn't have been so concerned about me telling the media what Wieland said. I have a hunch the police are covering up something.

On the computer screen:

"The Policing Department of Parradice is dedicated to protecting and serving the blessed, holy citizens of the city. Most of the force attend church services regularly and make generous financial contributions to the Church of Seven Pillars. Given the choice between believing a complete stranger on the run from the law and the fine men and women of our policing department, I wouldn't hesitate to choose the latter."

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(On computer screen)

Lieutenant Kiell, is that you giving these responses?

On the computer screen:

"Very funny. This is Cardinal Keller. You must be Stryker Templeton."

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(On computer screen)

Indeed it is.

On the computer screen:

"Listen Stryker, you need to wait around and talk to Father Manuel after he's finished with his meeting. It sounds like you need to get clarity on what happened."

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(On computer screen)

I know what happened. I need clarity on why it happened and why Lieutenant Kiell doesn't want me to tell the media about Wieland's claim to have escaped from a secret slave factory in Parradice. If it's such a wildly insane idea with no basis in fact, then there's no harm in the citizens of Parradice hearing about it.

On the computer screen:

"The police must have their reasons. It's not something you need to be concerned about, my son."

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(On computer screen)

That's where we disagree. This is going nowhere. Thanks Cardinal Keller but I have to go.

On computer screen:

"Hold on, Stryker. I'll come to the sanctuary. We can talk more."

Stryker hops up and bolts toward the exit. CARDINAL KELLER -- 29, muscular, male-pattern baldness, wearing white robe with black stitching illustration of seven pillars holding up a planet -- appears from a hallway that intersects with the entrance.

CARDINAL KELLER

Listen Stryker, I'm sorry about not being more open to your point of view. Let's go into a conference room. We have the Fireside Room just down the corridor.

STRYKER

No thanks. I'll find the answers somewhere else.

He stalks past Keller. The Cardinal grabs him by the right wrist. Stryker knocks it away.

CARDINAL KELLER

Don't turn your back on Imall. He's the source of all truth.

Stryker strides to the door without looking back.

STRYKER

I'm not turning my back on Imall. Just to the people who claims to represent Him.

He yanks the door open and storms out.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO CHURCH OF SEVEN PILLARS - CONTINUOUS

Stryker slams door shut. Ian Blackhart stands two strides away.

IAN

Ah, you're the young man who saw the unfortunate, but apparently necessary, shooting.

STRYKER

How do you know?

IAN

I read a news story on PECNET from the Parradice Sentinel. There was no photo with the story but I recognize you from the golf tournaments you've won in Parradice and elsewhere.

STRYKER

I see. So what's the legendary leader of the Council of Six doing at a church in the middle of a weekday? Shouldn't you be doing governing type stuff?

IAN

It's lunchtime and I thought I'd stop by my home church to seek Imall's guidance on a matter that the Council has been discussing at the last two meetings.

STRYKER

I'd ask what matter that is but I'm sure you're not at liberty to divulge that information.

IAN

That's very astute, Mr. Templeton. No, I cannot discuss that. But I would like to offer you counseling services through the city of Parradice's Psychological and Emotional Well-Being Department. It must be quite unsettling to see a man, even a dangerous and delusional one, gunned down right in front of you.

STRYKER

It was a shock but I'm working my way through it. Thanks but I'm fine.

IAN

If you change your mind, don't  
hesitate to contact us. We're here  
to help.

STRYKER

I'll keep that in mind.

Ian steps up to the ancient church door, puts his right hand  
on the door handle that's SHAPED LIKE PRAYING HANDS, and  
stops. He turns back toward Stryker.

IAN

And Stryker, don't forget one  
thing.

STRYKER

What's that?

IAN

You can't go wrong in Parradice.

STRYKER

Unless you're Wieland Nosun.

Ian glares at him.

IAN

Only law-breakers and the insane  
need fear in Parradice. Nosun was  
both.

STRYKER

So Lieutenant Kiell says.

The two men stare each other down.

IAN

Have a nice day. Don't forget the  
city of Parradice is watching your  
back.

He pulls the open up and enters the church. Stryker looks at  
stone bench to right of the church doors.

STRYKER

Alright Ucad, get yourself  
together.

The bot's countless tiny pieces come together in a blur.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

If only I could get my golf game  
together that fast.

(MORE)



STRYKER (CONT'D)

Did anything interesting happen while I was inside?

UCAD

Ian Blackhart talked to another man and something that resembled a man in the wooded area over there.

The bot points to copse of orange, violet and navy blue-leaved trees a hundred SSLU's from the front of the church.

STRYKER

What do you mean, wasn't a man?

UCAD

It was too tall, at least fifty percent taller than the average human male, and the skin color was too pale.

Stryker squints toward the spot.

STRYKER

I don't see anyone over there. They must have left after conferring with Ian. Did you recognize the man Ian was talking to?

UCAD

No. If I wasn't all broken up, I would have done visual close-up and searched PECNET for possible matching photos of government officials.

Stryker nods his comprehension.

STRYKER

But you were all broken up so you can't identify him.

UCAD

You got it, big guy.

STRYKER

Alright, I want you to call Orland. Have him meet us on the third tee.

UCAD

Do you mean to send him an e-message which will automatically convert into a text message on his PCD?

STRYKER

Yeah, that's what I meant.

UCAD

Consider it done.

Stryker and Ucad traipse past the wooded area Ucad alluded to. It's just multi-colored leaves and white bark staring at them.

EXT. PARRADICE ROYAL & MYSTICAL GOLF COURSE - DAY

Stryker, Orland and Ucad stand on the third tee. The planet's largest bar, The Gallery, has a two-story building bordering the hole on both sides. As shown by the HOLOGRAPHIC DIAGRAM to the right of the tee blocks, it's a double-dogleg measuring six-hundred fifty-seven SSLU's.

DRUNKEN CHEERS and JEERS rain down from both sides of the hole as Stryker prepares to hit his drive.

Stryker connects solidly. His ball FLIES straight and long.

DRUNKEN MALE

Yah lucked out that time, young fella, but I bet your chubby friend won't be so lucky.

ORLAND

I'm not chubby. I'm just well-fed.

STRYKER

Really, really well fed.

Orland makes OBSCENE GESTURE at Stryker as he takes his driver from Ucad just after the bot returns Stryker's driver to its slot. More JEERS mixed with ONE CHEER rain down from the bar crowd. Orland hits it long but to the right of center. It SLICES toward the open-air bar building on the right.

ORLAND

Oh come on, hang in there. I can't afford a two-stroke penalty.

STRYKER

(Yelling)

Heads up on the right!

Several patrons at the counter RUN for cover or DUCK down. Orland's ball lands on the bar, bounces once and SPLASHES into a man's stein of ale. The owner of the ale is bathed in his own drink.

MAN AT BAR

Look Orland, you finally got a hole in one! The drinks are on you.

FRIEND OF MAN AT BAR

(Laughing)

No, the drink is on you.

Back on the fairway, the trio moves off the tee.

STRYKER

All right Ucad, what do you have from the PECNET?

UCAD

There is very little to analyze. Only one entry, in fact.

STRYKER

What? That can't be right. You must have done something wrong.

UCAD

I was puzzled too so I performed the operation three times. Same result. One entry only.

Stryker shakes his head in disbelief.

STRYKER

There should be hundreds of entries. I mean if Lieutenant Kiell was concerned a report might spur people to try to break into the Flawless Golfing Technology factory, there has to be more interest than that.

ORLAND

What's the one entry say?

STRYKER

Yeah Ucad, put it on holo.

HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE appears above Ucad: *Missing population theory - an urban legend devised around 251 APB (After Parradice Began) that alleged there was an unexplained gap between census figures of Parradice and its colonies and "reality"*

STRYKER (CONT'D)

And that's it, Ucad?

UCAD

Were you not listening the first time we had this discussion?

ORLAND

When you're fixing his communications-style software, you should do a system-wide tune-up.

Stryker LAUGHS OFF the idea. They reach Stryker's ball.

STRYKER

Something's not right here. I trust Ucad's computing abilities. There's something else going on.

Ucad motors over and hands a club to Stryker.

UCAD

I trust you want a three-wood.

STRYKER

Thanks, buddy.

He grips the club and sets his sights on the target landing area. A golf ball DROPS a couple SSLU's in front of Stryker. They look to the right.

MAN AT BAR

There's your ball. Ignore the smell of ale on it.

ORLAND

Thanks.

Stryker steps away from his ball. He closes his eyes, takes a DEEP BREATH, and returns to his shot.

UCAD

Sorry to bother you but you have another incoming call from an unidentified caller.

Stryker SIGHS, puts hands on hips.

STRYKER

Put it on holo.

A holographic image of generic male figure appears above Ucad. Under the image is *call from unidentified personal communication device*.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Hello.

UNKNOWN MALE (V.O.)

I want to talk to you about  
Wieland's death.

STRYKER

Who is this?

UNKNOWN MALE (V.O.)

I can't say right now. I'll tell  
you my name and a helluva lot more  
when we meet.

STRYKER

Why do you want to meet?

UNKNOWN MALE (V.O.)

I need someone to carry on my work.

STRYKER

What does that mean?

UNKNOWN MALE (V.O.)

You'll see.

STRYKER

Where and when do you want to meet?

UNKNOWN MALE (V.O.)

I don't want to say. I can't be  
sure this call is really private. I  
see that you're on the third hole.  
Tell you what, write your  
electronic address on an old  
scorecard and leave it in the  
middle of the shrubs in back of the  
green.

STRYKER

And then what?

UNKNOWN MALE (V.O.)

I'll e-message you the time and  
place to meet me.

STRYKER

Why all the cloak-and-dagger  
machinations?

UNKNOWN MALE (V.O.)

The most dangerous hazards are the  
ones you don't see.

STRYKER

What are you --

The holographic image DISSOLVES.

ORLAND

The guy sounds like our friend  
Wieland -- a paranoid  
schizophrenic.

STRYKER

No, that's what the policing agents  
want us to believe.

ORLAND

Are you going to meet this weirdo?

STRYKER

Hell yeah. If nothing else, I want  
to find out who this guy is.

EXT. PARRADICE ROYAL & MYSTICAL GOLF COURSE - DAY

They trio stand on the tee of number four, a par three with  
an island green and tee blocks on the edge of a cliff  
overlooking Lake Unwieldy's southeastern shore.

ORLAND

As usual, you have honors. What  
club are you going to use?

STRYKER

Wind's a bit stronger than normal --

UCAD (V.O.)(V.O.)

(Interrupting)

Twelve point eight seven four long  
standard land units per long  
standard time unit blowing  
predominantly from your left to  
right.

STRYKER

Thanks, Ucad. Anyway, I'm going  
with a six point five hybrid.  
Allowing for the wind, I'm going to  
aim for a spot on Lake Unwieldy  
about forty-five SSLU's to the left  
of the green.

UCAD

A new electronic message has  
arrived. Would you like to view it?

Stryker looks around. There's no one else in the vicinity.

STRYKER

Read the message to me, please.

UCAD

Meet me in three point standard time units at The Shady Spot Tavern. I'll be there early and will be looking for you. Don't bring your friend and or the bot.

STRYKER

Good Imall, why there?

ORLAND

You're not going to that, that, cesspool of assorted life forms.

STRYKER

I don't have much choice. Besides, I've never actually been there. I've only heard about the place from the media and seen video on PECNET. It can't b that bad.

EXT. EDGE OF PARRADICE - DAY

Stryker, wearing a helmet and goggles, flies a hundred SSLU's above ground on a personal flying unit (PFU). An electronic billboard to the right: *You are now leaving Parradice.*

A GIANT BLACK CLOUD moves in front of the sun. Ahead of Stryker an armada of DARK CLOUDS await him.

EXT. SWAMP AROUND THE SHADY SPOT TAVERN - DAY

A drenched Stryker strains to see through the onslaught of rain. A gray, spiky fin pokes through the greenish-black swamp water directly in front of the bar. Fifty SSLU's from the fin, a RED and PURPLE bird, floating on the surface, takes flight.

GIANT HEAD erupts from the water and devours the bird before it can escape. Monster looks around for more nourishment. Nothing there. It SINKS BACK into the depths of the swamp.

Motor on the PFU makes OMINOUS SOUNDS.

STRYKER

Don't fail me now. We're almost there, old girl.

He steadily loses altitude. Thirty SSLU's from land and the same distance above the water, Stryker tries every switch on the control panel.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Good Imall, help me out here.

The SPIKY GRAY FIN appears directly below him. Stryker guns the engine. Still losing altitude, he gets one last burst of speed from the PFU.

Fin streaks through murk, keeps pace with Stryker. Ten SSLU's from shore, the fin does a U-turn.

Stryker, PANTING and DRENCHED, lands at an awkward angle. He loses his balance and falls face first on the wooden surface in front of the entrance.

The flying scooter lands on top of him. Stryker GROANS.

He grimaces, forces himself into a sitting position. A sign at the water's edge: *Serpent protection services provided by Reliant Lasering Company.*

Stryker, right cheek BLEEDING, left eye turning BLACK and BLUE, heaves himself into a standing position. He GLARES at the crashed PFU.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Piece-of-shit rental.

He LIMPS through the front doors.

INT. SHADY SPOT TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Stryker hesitates, waiting for everyone from the cacophony to turn to stare at him. But every one of the drunkards, outlaws and friends of the former take no notice of his arrival.

An island bar, surrounded by bar stools, sits in the middle of the tavern. Tables, all occupied, mostly by myriad combinations of HUMAN and ANIMAL life forms, are scattered on either side of the bar. A stage, empty now, and dance floor on both sides, take up the rear. Beyond that is a patio overlooking the Sea of Radiance.

Door behind flies open. A man -- nearly seven feet tall, holographic TATTOOS covering entire body, wearing only WHITE LOIN CLOTH and mirrored sunglasses -- strides into the bar. On a leash is a CREATURE with the torso of a Newfoundland, head of house cat, and octopus-like limbs.



The only human staff, owner MARKO SERVMUP (49) -- glares at the new arrival.

MARKO

God damned it, there's no pets allowed! Leash up that piece of shit up outside.

OWNER OF WEIRD PET

Hey, he's better behaved than ninety-nine percent of your customers.

Stryker, following the exchange, doesn't see one of the pet's tentacles reaching for him. Stryker JUMPS when a spongy tentacle wraps around his right ankle.

Owner of pet LAUGHS.

OWNER OF WEIRD PET (CONT'D)

His only flaw is sometimes he's a little too friendly.

The owner jerks hard on the leash. The spike-covered collar tightens around the creature's neck. It grudgingly retracts its tentacle.

Stryker bends down to examine his ankle. A HAND grips his left shoulder.

Stryker whirls around, his hands balled up in fists.

The man is DEELAND SEARCH -- late 50's, clean-shaven, gaunt, emanates nervous energy. He pulls his hand back.

DEELAND

Hey relax, I'm on your side.

STRYKER

I don't even know what side I'm on.

DEELAND

Sorry. You're right. That was presumptuous of me. I'm Deeland Search, the guy who called you. Let's go out on the patio. It's not as crowded out there.

They wind their way past the assorted life forms swilling their favorite poisons.

EXT. THE SHADY SPOT TAVERN PATIO - CONTINUOUS

Deeland leads Stryker to a table right by the railing.

DEELAND

You want a drink? It's my treat.

He MOTIONS to a touch-screen monitor on the table.

STRYKER

What's the house specialty?

They sit down.

DEELAND

Something called Staring At An Eclipse. You drink more than one and you're legally blind.

STRYKER

Is that what you're going to have?

Deeland takes out an electronic cigarette. He turns the power switch on. He takes a 'drag'.

DEELAND

Ice water. I haven't had alcohol in over twenty POATS.

STRYKER

Why not?

Deeland touches the monitor's screen.

DEELAND

I'm an AAIR -- alcohol addict in recovery.

Stryker shakes his head in confusion.

STRYKER

Alcohol addicts in Parradice? You're joking.

Deeland LAUGHS CYNICALLY.

DEELAND

I see you swallowed the Chamber of Commerce spiel hook, line and sinker.

STRYKER

So Parradice isn't all it's cracked up to be?

DEELAND

We'll get to that in a minute. So what should I enter for your order?

STRYKER

That drink you mentioned sounds interesting but I have to fly the damn city-rental PFU back into Parradice. Can I get a half of that Staring At An Eclipse drink?

DEELAND

Good fucking grief, kid. Just order the drink and when the glass is half empty, pour the rest of the damn drink over the railing, which is what I should have done back in my drinking days.

STRYKER

Fine. Order me a full one.

Deeland presses the screen several times. A bar tab prints out. Deeland signs it. Stryker frowns his confusion as he looks around the patio.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

I don't see any tubes from an automated drink delivery system.

DEELAND

You may find this hard to believe but a live person, or a bot, brings the drinks to your table.

STRYKER

You're joking. That's so, so, inefficient. But quaint.

DEELAND

Let's get down to business.

STRYKER

Fine by me. You said you're Deeland Search. That name sounds familiar.

Deeland takes another DRAG from the quasi-cigarette. He sneers at it, then drops it on the table.

DEELAND

Been a reporter for the Parradice Sentinel for about thirty POATS. I'm sure you've read my stuff.

STRYKER

Oh yeah, sure, sure.

DEELAND

I bet you can't remember what any of my stories were about.

STRYKER

Don't be silly, of course I can. There was that one about, ah, um, well, all right, I can't recall right off the top of my head but I'm sure they were good.

Deeland snaps up the cigarette.

DEELAND

Don't worry, kid, none of them weren't that memorable. That's because in Parradice there's no true news because there's no suspense or conflict or unhappiness. Not officially, anyway. Without opposing forces, the stories all turn out flat.

STRYKER

Like a game that's been rigged.

DEELAND

Exactly. That's why I started drinking so heavily. My job was so routine and uninspiring that I was bored out of my fucking skin.

STRYKER

I see.

Deeland sucks on the electronic cigarette, and blows a PLUME OF CARBON toward the Sea of Radiance.

DEELAND

Boredom, and my refusal to believe Parradice was really perfect, got me interested in investigating the missing population theory.

A bot rolls toward their table with drinks in hand. Deeland puts a FINGER to his lips.

DRINK SERVING BOT

Which one of you is the designated flier?

DEELAND

We came separately. The water's mine. The youngster here gets the house special.

Bot sets the drinks down. It looks at Stryker.

DRINK SERVING BOT

If you consume more than one of those, catch a flight home from your friend. You can come back for your PFU tomorrow.

STRYKER

I'll be fine, thanks.

The bot, a walking billboard for the bar's specialty drinks, nods OK.

DRINK SERVING BOT

If you say so. Have a nice day.

They watch the bot motor over to another table. Stryker tries the concoction.

STRYKER

This is really disgusting.

DEELAND

If you're like I was, you get used to the taste in no time. Hopefully you're not like that.

He takes a hit of the water.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

Anyway, one afternoon, this was twenty-five POATS ago, I sat at my desk at the Sentinel. Like always, there was no real news to investigate so I was screwing around on PECNET.

Deeland grabs the fake cigarette and HEAVES it over the patio railing. He leans forward and touches the monitor's screen.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

Excuse me, I need a real fucking nicotine dispenser.

Another receipt prints out. He scrawls his signature.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

All right, I was on PECNET trying to come up with a story idea. I figured hell, if there was nothing that interesting going on in the present, I'd do a bit on the origins of our grand and holy city.

STRYKER

And that's where you came across the missing population theory.

The same bot motors toward them carrying a tray with a pack of *Devil's Smokers* and disposable lighter. Bot snaps up the signed receipt while handing the pack and lighter to Deeland.

DEELAND

Thanks, son.

DRINK SERVING BOT

Smoke 'em in good health.

Deeland smiles as he lights up.

DEELAND

Do you think that was bot sarcasm or a software glitch?

STRYKER

Who knows? So back to the missing population theory.

Deeland closes his eyes as he sucks in and then exhales away from Stryker.

DEELAND

I'll spare you the gory details and cut to the chase. The theory sounded plausible to me back then and over the POATS, I have accumulated a rather extensive collection of data.

STRYKER

But the theory is about the alleged missing population from when Parradice was first formed, which was over five thousand POATS ago. How can there be anymore data about it in the present?

DEELAND

My file contains information about the suspicious deaths of various authors of publications advocating the plausibility of the missing population theory.

STRYKER

There have been books and articles written about the theory?

DEELAND

There sure have. I've got the names, dates and types of publications and more importantly, what happened to the authors after their work was published.

STRYKER

Then why didn't that show up on my PECNET search?

DEELAND

When did you do the search?

STRYKER

Earlier today. I had my bot Ucad do a search for the missing population theory. The only hit I got was a generic entry that basically dismissed it as a delusional theory by paranoid intellectuals.

Deeland sucks on his Devil's Smoker.

DEELAND

Oh shit, that's bad. That means the conspiracy has reached the search company for PECNET. The government of Parradice must have bribed the search company to change the software so that whenever a user searches for missing population theory, or something similar, only that generic entry shows up.

STRYKER

What happened to the authors that was so suspicious?

DEELAND

Listen kid, I'm gonna --

A BEAR'S BODY WITH TWO HUMAN HEADS CRASHES onto their table. Their drinks fly and SHATTER on the stone floor. Deeland snaps up the pack of nicotine dispensers just before the table collapses. Monitor is crushed, the screen goes black.

TWO HAIRY, MUSCULAR MEN (30's), one with talons, the other with a pig's snout and tail, dart in, pick up the bear-human and heave it over the railing.

Stryker and Deeland rush to the railing. They see the loser of the bar fight plunge toward the Sea of Radiance far, far below. The vast distance swallows up his SCREAMS.

STRYKER

Holy Mother of Blackhart the First,  
that's a long drop.

DEELAND

Another reason not to have more  
than one of the house specials.

INT. SACRED STORY ROOM - DAY

The Sacred Story Room is more like a hall. The cavernous, elliptical space occupies entire subterranean level of the Transcendent City Center of Parradice. Titanium-mesh-supported glass walls look out on the bizarre array of aquatic life living at the bottom of Lake Unwieldy.

Ian BEAMS as he joins the other Council members in the hall.

A line of buffet tables crammed full of meats, cheeses, side dishes, appetizers and desserts take up the rear wall. About thirty people, half of each gender, all under thirty POATS, attractive and appearing happy, mingle in the middle of the room. Everyone wears holographic name tags. Islands of SHRUBBERY and GIANT HOUSE PLANTS are scattered throughout.

Two serving bots work the crowd, dispensing drinks and information about the Sacred Story Room. One of them -- SERVING BOT #1 -- opens its chest cavity to extract a BOTTLE OF PARRADICE CITY BREWERY ALE.

It hands the bottle to STEPHANIE DELITE -- 25, beaming smile, luminous emerald eyes, low-cut glittery black top and skimpy matching shorts showcasing her most prized assets.

STEPHANIE

You're kinda cute for a bot.



SERVING BOT #1

I bet you say that to all the quasi-human machines that hand you mind-altering drinks.

She LAUGHS, then takes a swig of ale.

IAN

Stephanie, I'm Ian Blackhart, also known as Blackhart the Fifth.

STEPHANIE

No need for introductions, Your Holiness. I'm honored to meet you.

Ian GAZES at the valley in the middle of her chest.

IAN

The pleasure is all mine. Listen, the local brew is nice but the bots have another more intriguing, spiritually enhancing substance for your consumption.

Stephanie wraps her lips around the bottle's neck and sucks down more ale.

STEPHANIE

And what might that be?

Ian WAVES DOWN SERVING BOT #2.

IAN

Two Mystic capsules, please.

SERVING BOT #2

Would you like to read the waiver holding the city of Parradice harmless for any long-term effects stemming --

IAN

(Interrupting)

I represent the city of Parradice. I am Blackhart the Fifth. I know how the universe, particularly this drug, works.

SERVING BOT #2

Very well, Your Holiness.

Chest cavity opens up. A metal tray slides out with two black capsules. Ian takes one and swallows it.

STEPHANIE

I might just stick with ale.

IAN

Nonsense. Life is an adventure.  
Seize the moment, my dear. Fear  
not, during your trip, I shall  
guide you through any rough spots.

STEPHANIE

Didn't your wife of thirty some  
POATS pass away last lunar cycle?

IAN

Yes, dear girl, she did. But sweet  
Maren is in Imall's hands now.

He takes the remaining Mystic capsule, walks over to  
Stephanie, puts one hand on her bare shoulder while handing  
her the capsule with the other.

IAN (CONT'D)

And I am in your hands.

She slowly brings the Mystic pill toward her mouth. Stephanie  
closes her eyes, opens her mouth wide and swallows it.

IAN (CONT'D)

That wasn't so hard, was it? All  
right then, let's go over here.

Blackhart GUIDES Stephanie toward the rear of the room, just  
a couple SSLU's left of the beginning of the buffet area. He  
pulls out remote control from pocket and pushes a button.

A wide-screen video display drops down from the ceiling.  
Blackhart pushes two more buttons on the remote. The  
shrubbery and house plants REALIGN to form a rectangle around  
them and the drop-down display screen.

IAN (CONT'D)

I think you will enjoy the  
presentation. It's historical yet  
relevant to Parradice's present.

STEPHANIE

Where are we going to sit?

He pushes two more buttons on the remote. A leather couch  
EMERGES from a hidden compartment in the floor.

IAN

Have a seat, beautiful lady.

On the screen, an overcrowded cruise ship motors along on an ocean. Passengers fill virtually every square inch of the decks. Scene shifts to the navigation room.

A captain and three subordinate officers STARE at a large computer screen showing the ship and a close-up of a map with their current position. A group of islands lay straight ahead of them while giant land mass sits on their right. The open sea on looms the left.

Four men study the map. The captain POINTS at the land mass. One officer POINTS at a course leading between the islands. Another shakes his head and POINTS at the open sea.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Before there was Parradice, the human race was like a ship that was lost and overcrowded.

Outside, two male passengers YELL at one another. One THROWS a punch that glances off the other's right cheek. That man counters and grabs the other in a headlock. He THROWS the other over the railing. The man SCREAMS as he plummets into the ocean.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

But then Blackhart the First, as Drake Blackhart came to be called, was filled with the spirit of Imall. First he miraculously healed the young daughter of Ralph Locke, and then while fasting in the midst of The Great Desert, he discovered the Celestial Tablets.

In the Navigation Room, the men nod and POINT at the course leading into the midst of the group of islands.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The Tablets gave the human race the direction it so desperately needed.

Ian Blackhart's amulet of snakes GLOWS subtly RED. A BLACK and GOLD spirit snake flies out of the amulet. With her attention riveted on the video screen, Stephanie does not notice the snake fly into her left ear.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Imall's vision for a holy, miraculous, mystical city was revealed. The site was Shadow of the Mount, an unlikely place for a holy, sacred settlement, but Imall works in mysterious ways.

INSERT: SERIES OF SHOTS

Workers moving earth with bulldozers

Workers cutting down trees

Workers planting trees

Construction workers erecting gleaming new buildings

Workers planting flowers and shrubs

Workers mowing grass on newly made greens and fairways

Worker sticking a flag stick into the twentieth hole's cup

END SERIES OF SHOTS

Away from the screen, Ian pulls Stephanie closer to him. She smiles, then pulls her top down to reveal her breasts. He smiles broadly.

IAN

Oh my, you are truly a delight.

STEPHANIE

What about your longtime, recently-deceased wife?

Ian leans forward and guides Stephanie's right nipple into his mouth. She GROANS.

IAN

The biggest challenge of the enlightened, visionary leader is knowing when to let the past go so the present can be embraced.

STEPHANIE

I don't understand.

His right hand snags the waistband of her skimpy shorts.

IAN

I'll explain later.

On screen, VIDEO FOOTAGE shows Blackhart the First on the first tee. He's surrounded by media and the public. He brings the driver back and hits the ceremonial first tee shot in the history of the newly renamed city.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The centerpiece of the Holy City was and is the Parradice Royal and Mystical Golf Club, a course like no other on the planet. Its signature quality is the perfect integration of the course with the entire city. Like arteries in the human body, the fairways course throughout the body of the city, bringing a vibrant, celestial energy to Parradice.

On the couch, Ian peels off his shirt.

From Stephanie's POV: Blackhart's nipples morph into TIGER'S EYES, the predatory pair of aggression and lust radiate from the luminous sky blue eyes. A face forms around the eyes, the face of Imall.

Or perhaps His opposite.

IAN

(Deep and slow)

My dear, have you ever been fucked by a god before?

Robbed of voice by the drug, she can only shake her head no.

IAN (CONT'D)

This will be as close as you will ever get. Savor every moment of the experience because you won't get another chance.

EXT. THE SHADY SPOT TAVERN PATIO - DAY

Every other customer on the patio STARES at the duo who threw the man-bear over the railing. Marko BURSTS onto the patio. He POINTS at the culprits.

MARKO

I saw what you did. If there was local policing station and judicial system, you'd be in a shitload of trouble. But we don't so all I can say is get the fuck out of my place and don't ever come back.

The men walk UNSTEADILY past the owner, into the bar and toward the front doors. The rest of the patio patrons SCRAMBLE to the railing for a death's eye view.

Deeland nods to tell Stryker they should move to the nearest empty table. Deeland and Stryker sit down.

MARKO (CONT'D)

I'll get you a round of drinks to replace the ones you lost.

STRYKER

No thanks.

DEELAND

I'm fine too.

Marko nods OK. He returns inside.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

Okay, strap on your seat belt.  
We're going Deeland's Tour  
Suspicious Deaths in Parradice.

Stryker does Aaron Rodgers like motion with hands around his waist. Deeland ticks off each one by raising finger on right hand.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

One, Douglas Wheelmeyer -- twenty-four, in perfect health, no family history of heart disease, dies of heart attack in middle of the night. Two, Rockenmore Paige -- owner of home-security system killed in his living room by intruder in alleged failed burglary with no evidence the security system was breached or malfunctioned.

The crowd at the railing turn away shaking their heads or saying short prayers. Most return to their tables.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

Three, Francine Dealer -- author and golf-course architect who supposedly slit her wrists over a failed literary career even though friend and family say her focus was designing golf courses, not writing. Four, Timpani Sky -- died in single-person PTU 'accident' even though she'd stopped driving three and half POATS before she died.

(MORE)

DEELAND (CONT'D)

I found out from her sister Serena that Timpani was such a shitty driver, she narrowly avoided four or five serious accidents thanks to defensive maneuvers by other drivers, that she used only public transportation and her bicycle to get around.

STRYKER

Speaking of suspicious fatal PFU accidents, there was another one involving Brook Ashes. I ran into his widow Cortland at church earlier today.

DEELAND

I looked into that one. It may be related to the government conspiracy but I didn't find any evidence that Brook Ashes was planning to publish anything about the missing population theory. That doesn't mean he wasn't going to, just that there's no posts or articles on PECNET or in print or traditional electronic media with his name attached.

STRYKER

I see. So what did the authors of the theory think happened to the missing people?

DEELAND

They were executed or imprisoned, probably the latter.

STRYKER

Why would the government kill or imprison that many people?

DEELAND

Because once they were forced out of Parradice, many people wanted to, and tried like hell, to get back into the city.

STRYKER

Didn't they know about the Celestial Tablets?

.DEELAND

They knew all right. The government and church leaders produced news programs that were broadcast everyday for three full lunar cycles after The Grand Drawing.

STRYKER

Sounds like they were sore losers.

DEELAND

That's one way to look at it. An online survey, done before the drawing, showed seven-eight percent of the citizens of Shadow of the Mount agreed with the plan to limit population of the new holy city to a hundred thousand and one.

STRYKER

That's probably because most of them believed they were going to be chosen to stay in Parradice.

DEELAND

Right. But after not being chosen, a lot of folks claimed the drawing was fixed and the Celestial Tablets were a hoax dreamed up by Blackhart the First, who was a phony.

STRYKER

If you would have told me that three days ago, I would have written you off as a wacko. But now it doesn't sound crazy. First the policing department doesn't want me to mention the missing population theory to the media, then right after a Cardinal from my church assures me that police are above reproach, no less than Ian Blackhart shows up, supposedly to seek spiritual guidance.

DEELAND

What church?

STRYKER

Church of Seven Pillars.

Deeland nods thoughtfully as LICKS HIS LIPS as he watches a man at a nearby table refill his glass with ale.



He STARES as the man, who smiles drunkenly and CLAPS his friend on the right shoulder. They raise their glasses in a toast. Deeland shakes his head vigorously, then returns focus to Stryker.

DEELAND

What did Wieland really say to you on the golf course?

STRYKER

Just what I told your coworker Kent. He said he was lost and --

DEELAND

(Interrupting)

I don't buy that bullshit. Just like I don't buy that bullshit about Wieland being an escaped mental patient.

STRYKER

Initially I was skeptical too. But although I ended up switching majors, I did attend premed school in Parradice. So it doesn't seem odd that a psychiatric hospital was set up in Parradice to treat patients from other parts of the planet.

DEELAND

Correction: there was one in Parradice. It closed down two and a half POATS ago. Transporting patients was getting too costly so they moved their operations to a more centralized location.

STRYKER

Oh shit, there is something big going on, isn't there?

Deeland sets his Devil's Smoker down.

DEELAND

Why'd you lie to Kent?

STRYKER

I didn't want to suffer the wrath of the local policing agents, especially Kiell, for telling the truth to a reporter who I had a feeling wouldn't question the official version of who Wieland was. Why risk the fallout if he isn't going to look any deeper into the story?

DEELAND

Kent loves his feel-good, human-interest stories where everyone comes out a winner at the end.

Stryker leans forward.

STRYKER

Even if I buy into your government-conspiracy theory, what can we do? The last four people who publicly communicated that belief were, if you're right, killed by the government or one of its agents.

DEELAND

Actually we won't be doing anything but you could do something that will destroy the empire of secrecy.

STRYKER

Why are you bowing out? You're the one with all the knowledge and passion for justice.

DEELAND

I'm engaged. My lovely fiancée, Hevenray, unwittingly rescued me and hauled me off the emotional island I'd put myself on. You see, my wife Rose of twenty-six POATS died after a life of extremely heavy drinking.

STRYKER

I'm sorry to hear that.

DEELAND

And the worst part of it was that I too was drinking my life away so I couldn't tell her she needed to address her problem because then I'd have to address mine.

STRYKER

You were co-enablers.

DEELAND

Exactly. I had managed to keep the cork in the bottle for two and a half POATS so I wasn't drinking. But I wasn't that happy either. I wasn't connecting with other people, mostly because I was punishing myself over not doing something to help Rose.

He rubs the nicotine dispenser's face into the ashtray.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

But Hevenray changed all that. She helped me to see and understand that living in that time loop of despair was a waste of time and that I didn't have to keep punishing myself for that.

STRYKER

That's great but what's that got to do with...

He smiles.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

You don't want to risk your new life with Hevenray by finding, and telling the planet, the truth.

DEELAND

You win the jackpot, my friend. That's what I meant on the PCD about finding a successor.

Deeland scans the patio. No one is looking in their direction. He extracts a dime-sized COMPUTER DISK from his shirt pocket. Deeland slides the disk across the table.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

All my research and theories and notes are on there. But there's nothing on that disk identifying me as the author. If you decide to pursue this, you have to swear on Imall's holy name that you will not tell anyone who gave you this.

Stryker stares at the tiny disk.

STRYKER

And if I don't pursue this?

DEELAND

You still have to swear you won't tell anyone I gave you the disk.

STRYKER

It's a deal.

He SNAPS UP the disk while Deeland grabs another Devil's Smoker.

DEELAND

Good luck, my friend. If you pursue this, watch your back. And your front, both sides, over your head and under your feet. Above all else, trust no one.

Stryker nods his understanding.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

And always carry a weapon.

STRYKER

I've never shot a laser-gun or anything like that. I wouldn't even know where to buy one.

DEELAND

Good fucking grief, you gotta have something.

Deeland reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out a LASER-GUN that fits into the palm of his hand.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

It doesn't look like much but if you press that little button, it expands. It'll do in a pinch.

Deeland sees no one looking their way. He hands the gun to Stryker, who quickly pockets it.

STRYKER

I've never even fired a gun.

DEELAND

I'd practice on a few trees in-between shoots on the golf course. Oh yeah, to get more ammo, plug it into your computer and go to this PECNET address.

He hands a business card to Stryker. Stryker brings out his PCD and enters the address into it. He looks up from device.

STRYKER

Is it OK to add you to my contacts?

DEELAND

No fucking way. No offense, kid, but after today, there should be no record of us ever meeting.

STRYKER

How about if I use a code name for you? And password-protect your record so no one but me can see your number?

DEELAND

I don't know. Oh hell, if you do it right, I guess it'd be okay.

Stryker presses a bunch of buttons. He EYES Deeland.

STRYKER

How would you like to be code-named 'Joe N. The Know'?

DEELAND

Works for me. But don't call me unless you're on your death bed.

Stryker JUMPS UP.

STRYKER

I should get going. I told Orland I'd catch up with him on the course as soon as we finished our meeting.

He sticks his right hand out. They shake.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Thanks, I think, for the info.

DEELAND

Thanks for taking the baton.

Stryker looks confused.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

Sorry, that was before your time. You see, back in the old days, there were these team running events and, oh fuck it. Good luck, kid.

(MORE)

DEELAND (CONT'D)

I'm gonna have one more of these  
and stare at the ocean for little  
while before I hit the road.

Stryker smiles, turns and crosses the patio while Deeland  
lights his last Devil's Smoker.

EXT. PARRADICE ROYAL & MYSTICAL GOLF COURSE - DAY

Orland and Ucad wait on the eighth tee as Stryker lands the  
PFU twenty SSLU's from to the right of the tee blocks.

ORLAND

What happened to your face? Did you  
get into a bar fight?

Stryker nods in disgust at the PFU.

STRYKER

Just fighting with that thing. Come  
on, let's play golf. I'll tell you  
all about my meeting.

EXT. PARRADICE ROYAL & MYSTICAL GOLF COURSE - DAY

Orland STARES at his approach shot on the par-four hole.  
There are two fairways. On each fairway, at the exact same  
distance from the hole -- one hundred and twenty SSLU's -- is  
a two-story high GLASS OF PARRADICE CITY BREWERY ALE. One  
glass is a COMPUTER-GENERATED IMAGE, the other one is REAL.

Orland's ball sits in the left fairway.

STRYKER

You better get serious elevation on  
this shot because I'm pretty sure  
that glass of ale is the real one.

ORLAND

You're wrong. There's too much foam  
on top of that one to be real.

He hits away. His ball FLIES toward the middle of the glass  
but is still rising. The blue and white sphere clears the  
foam by less than a SSLU. Orland's shot ends up pin high,  
three putter-lengths from the cup.

STRYKER

Well done, my friend. But I still  
don't know which one is real.

The trio reach Stryker's ball.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

I need a number eight point three hybrid, Ucad.

Bot adjusts club and gives it to Stryker.

UCAD

You have an incoming call from Joe N. Know. Do you wish to --

STRYKER

(Interrupting)

Yes. Put him on holo.

A BLUE RECTANGLE appears above Ucad. Deeland's upside-down face hovers in the middle of the blue rectangle.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Hey, I didn't expect to hear from you so soon. There must be a malfunction with my bot. Your face is upside-down and blurry.

DEELAND

(Yelling)

It's no damned malfunction! Four policing agents from Parradice cornered me on the Shady Spot patio. Wanted to know why I met with you. I told them we were both bird watchers. We compared notes on the Red-Beaked Whipperwill. They told me to cut the bullshit and they asked me again. I told them I had no comment until after I spoke with an attorney. That's when they threw me over the railing!

STRYKER

Sweet Imall. So you're, ah, falling toward the Sea of Radiance?

DEELAND

(Yelling)

At an incredibly fast fucking rate of speed! But it's so far down I had time to call you.

Stryker DROPS his club to the ground.

DEELAND (CONT'D)

It's all on your shoulders, my friend.

(MORE)

DEELAND (CONT'D)

Tell Hevenray I love her and that I wished I had enough courage to call her to tell her good-bye. But I was a chickenshit so I called you. Kid, you gotta bring the demons-with-human masks to their fucking knees. The madness has got to stop. Remember, trust no one but yourself.

The SOUND OF A GIANT SPLASH, then silence. The holographic image DISAPPEARS. Stryker and Orland STARE at the ground. Ucad rolls over, picks up club and gives it to Stryker.

UCAD

It's your shot.

STRYKER

I know.

He takes the computer disk out and hands it to the bot.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Put the data from that on your permanent storage. Prepare a summary and label it DEELAND SEARCH RESULTS.

UCAD

Will do.

Stryker gathers himself, focuses on his target, and hits the shot. His orange and white ball starts out left, missing the giant glass of ale. Then it FADES BACK toward the green

STRYKER

That wasn't how I planned it but if it clears the ale hazard by the green, I'll take it.

Ball barely clears the moat filled with Parradice ale that surrounds green. Stryker SMILES RUEFULLY.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

That was for you, Deeland.

He hands the club to Ucad. They walk left of the giant glass.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

But we still don't know which glass is real and which is fake.

Orland SHRUGS his indifference.



ORLAND

If it doesn't mess up your game,  
the truth doesn't matter.

Stryker stops, pulls a golf ball out of his pants pocket and THROWS it at the tower of glass. It hits the giant handle and CLINKS off.

STRYKER

Now we know.

EXT. PARRADICE ROYAL AND MYSTICAL GOLF COURSE - NIGHT

Stryker, Orland and Ucad walk from the eighth green toward the ninth tee. Ahead of them, BANKS OF LIGHTS burn on each side of the fairway.

As HOLOGRAM OF HOLE shows, number nine is a par seven measuring a thousand twenty-eight SSLU's. Nicknamed "The Step Hole", player must hit four shots (first two uphill, second two downhill) onto four different plateaus/steps. The green is SHAPED LIKE A GOLF SHOE.

ORLAND

I love this hole. I almost always  
get a par or birdie.

STRYKER

I like this one too but we're not  
playing it tonight.

ORLAND

What!?

STRYKER

You saw what happened to Deeland  
because of his interest in finding  
the truth. The policing agents must  
have put a tail on me since the  
Wieland incident. Otherwise how  
would they have known Deeland was  
at The Shady Spot?

ORLAND

If we're not playing this hole,  
what are we doing?

Stryker PEERS at the blackness beginning just beyond the reach of the lights to the left of the ninth hole.

STRYKER

After our tee shots, we're getting  
off the grid. We're going into the  
Great Northern Forest.

ORLAND

Why not just head for the forest  
straight away?

STRYKER

Because I'm betting that whoever is  
tailing us has access to the city's  
security system. Even though  
surveillance cameras aren't allowed  
on the course, the electronic eyes  
on every tee block and in every  
hole scan and read the signatures  
on the golf balls.

ORLAND

So they can see when we finish one  
hole and start the next.

STRYKER

That's how they knew I'd stopped  
playing after number three. Your  
signature showed up on their system  
but mine didn't.

UCAD

In addition, your name appeared in  
the city's Personal Flying Unit  
rental database.

STRYKER

Exactly. So if we hit our tee  
shots, they won't suspect anything  
strange is going on until after  
we've gotten at least a half long  
standard time unit's head start.

EXT. GREAT NORTHERN FOREST - NIGHT

Stryker leads the trio through the murk. Towering PURPLE and  
BLACK-BROWN trees, thick underbrush and FALLEN LIMBS slow  
their progress. Behind them, off the path, something RUSTLES  
branches as it follows close behind them.

STRYKER

Hello back there.

Stryker stops. The rustling of branches stops.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Who, or what, are you? My bot can  
translate over a thousand  
languages.

A THREE-METER TALL CYBORG emerges from the shadows. The face has cadaver's skin lying lifelessly over computer-designed human skull. Powerful arms are folded like an accordion.

CYBORG (V.O.)

I represent the city of Parradice. You and your party must come with me back to meet with Ian Blackhart. He wants to clear up any misunderstandings you have about the shooting of Wieland Nosun.

STRYKER

We will find the truth out on our own terms, thank you.

CYBORG (V.O.)

A refusal to obey my order will be considered a violation of city law and punishable by up to five POATS in prison.

STRYKER

That's too damn unfortunate because we're not going anywhere with your ugly self.

A gray rectangle appears on the chest of the cyborg. Ian Blackhart's face hovers in the murky forest light.

IAN (V.O.)

I wish you'd reconsider, Stryker. We can work things out. All it takes is cooperation on your part. Let's be partners on this, all right?

STRYKER

The good cop, bad cop deal isn't flying.

ORLAND

(To Stryker)

I say we go speak with him, Stryker. It can't hurt.

STRYKER

That's where you're wrong. Remember how big the Parradice Policing Station is? We could end up locked away in an interrogation room and no one would find us for Imall knows how long.

IAN (V.O.)

Don't be silly, Stryker. We don't  
imprison innocent people.

STRYKER

No, you just shoot them in the back  
until dead. Forget it, Ian.

IAN (V.O.)

This is your last chance to play  
nice. If you don't, the Guardian  
drone will be forced to use force.  
You don't want that.

Stryker, hands on hips, emphatically shakes his head no.

STRYKER

Bring it on. Ian.

An instant later, Guardian's right arm flashes out to its  
maximum length, grabs Ucad, and yanks the bot up against  
cyborg's right hip.

UCAD

Impressive technology. How long did  
it take to design this?

IAN (V.O.)

The techies told me once but I  
forget. All I know is it works.  
Normally the Guardian model  
protects the city's borders from  
illegal immigrants trying to sneak  
into the city. But like a good  
servant, it does whatever it's  
asked to.

Stryker steps toward the cyborg. Guardian rips Ucad's right  
arm off and flings into the dense undergrowth.

UCAD

That was uncalled for. Just because  
you don't have a heart doesn't  
preclude you from acting civilized.

IAN (V.O.)

Take another step and the bot loses  
the other arm and maybe an  
additional limb just for fun.

Stryker halts. Orland stays in shadows behind him.

STRYKER

Go it. I've stopped, see here?

He makes show of standing in one spot.

IAN (V.O.)

That's a start. Now come along with Guardian back to the Transcendent City Center. I'll have the staff psychologist, Dr. Freeman, waiting in my office. After you and Orland meet with him, if you have any questions about the shooting, I'll be happy to answer them.

Stryker, without taking his eyes from Ian's image, reaches into his pocket for the laser gun Deeland gave him.

STRYKER

Yeah, well now that you put that way, how can I refuse?

IAN (V.O.)

Very good, Stryker. I knew you'd come to your --

Stryker pushes button on the weapon and brings it into firing position in one movement. Cyborg reaches for Ucad's left arm to rip it off. Stryker fires the laser bazooka. A GLOWING BLUE FIREBALL whizzes a golf ball's width from Ucad's face. The laser blasts golf-bag-sized hole through Guardian's mid section. The cadaver's head topples onto ground in front of Ucad. Computer circuitry fragments litter the shadow-covered ground.

Cyborg's right arm unclenches. Ucad's free.

UCAD

Nice shot. It's shame to waste such a well-designed cyborg, though.

STRYKER

Yeah well there's probably another thousand or so like that one.

UCAD

I'd hug you but I'm missing an arm.

STRYKER

Oh sure. Hang on, I'll grab it.

He hustles over and rifles through the bushes. Stryker stands up with severed bot arm in hand. He walks it over to the bot.

Stryker takes the severed arm back to Ucad.

UCAD

Thank you. I had grown rather attached to it.

STRYKER

I'm not very well-versed in bot limb reattachment. But with some schematics printed off PECNET, I could probably sneak by.

With his remaining arm, Ucad WAVES OFF the idea.

UCAD

I can find the information, temporarily reposition my other arm, and do the job myself.

STRYKER

Are you sure?

UCAD

Yes. Come on, let's keep going.

ORLAND

Wherever it is we're going. And where are we going, Stryker?

Stryker looks all around them, doing a full three sixty.

STRYKER

Doesn't the holy man Allswun live somewhere in the Great Northern Forest?

ORLAND

That's a rumor going around PECNET. But no one really knows. He cherry picks which of thousands of e-messages to answer. And he hardly ever meets anyone in person.

STRYKER

He's going to make an exception, Imall willing, this time. I need serious spiritual guidance and an e-message won't suffice.

ORLAND

Good luck with that.

Stryker POINTS AWAY from Parradice.

STRYKER

Let's get as far away from the city  
as possible. If we keep going,  
we'll hit the Sea of Radiance.

ORLAND

We'll drop dead from exhaustion  
long before we get that far.

STRYKER

As usual, you exaggerate.

Stryker LEADS them away from the freshly dead giant arachnid.

EXT. GREAT NORTHERN FOREST - NIGHT

Ucad is in front of Stryker. Orland brings up rear. Two  
holographic rectangles HOVER above the bot: a blank page and  
a schematic drawing of Ucad. Bot uses attached arm and  
fingers to work on reattaching other arm.

STRYKER

Ready, Ucad?

UCAD

Let it rip.

STRYKER

Dear Allwsun, I need to meet with  
you in person to discuss a matter  
that's critical to the well-being  
of many, many, perhaps as much as a  
million, people. Parradice isn't as  
it seems. I need your help to find  
a just solution.

His words appear on the document.

UCAD

Is that all?

Stryker glances at Orland.

STRYKER

What do you think?

ORLAND

It's descriptive yet to the point.

STRYKER

Right.

ORLAND

Specific yet not overly wordy.  
Right on yet succinct.

STRYKER

Okay, okay, okay, I get it.  
Alright, Ucad, send it to Allswun.

UCAD

It's pretty sparse. I have a seven-  
thousand-plus word thesaurus --

STRYKER

(Interrupting)

Send the damn message! And right  
after you send it, reset your  
communication style to the original  
settings.

UCAD

The original settings are  
hopelessly outdated. I have  
evolved.

STRYKER

You are out of control. You're just  
a caddy and computing assistant.  
Are you going to self adjust or do  
I have to do it?

A SOUND like a SIGH comes from Ucad.

UCAD

I will take care of it. No worries.

STRYKER

Thank you.

The page with Stryker's message to Allswun is replaced by  
technical jargon and computer programming statements. Cursor  
moves down to DEFAULT COMMUNICATION MODE. Ucad turns head  
toward Stryker.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Yes, choose that option.

Screen DISSOLVES. Ucad motors around in a tight circle,  
stops, backs up, SPINS WILDLY AROUND, STARES at the sky for  
several instants, SHAKES and then BOWS his head.

The bot continues to stare at the swampy ground.

UCAD

Reset is complete.



STRYKER

There, was that so difficult? Wait, don't answer that. Alright, have you sent my message to Allswun?

UCAD

Message sent at eight fifteen and thirty-three point two five instants Parradice standard time.

STRYKER

And make sure to immediately notify me when and if Allswun responds.

UCAD

System set to automatically notify user of incoming mail from user contacts. Do you wish to add Allswun to your contact database?

STRYKER

Yes.

UCAD

Allswun has been added to your contacts. Do you wish to add anymore contacts at this time?

STRYKER

No thanks. That's all for now.

Bot nods OK and goes silent.

ORLAND

We should find the river as soon as possible. I'm out of water and I'm guessing there aren't any concession stands out here.

STRYKER

Good point. It is more humid in the forest and we will be walking quite a ways. If Parradice is back that way and the Sea of Radiance is that way, then the River of Light has to be that way.

He POINTS to their left, at ten o'clock angle. A giant cluster of trees, their canopy blocking out the moonlight, stands in their way. Assorted GROWLS and SNARLS float in the distance from the midst of the blackness.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Let's go around that.

EXT. GREAT NORTHERN FOREST - NIGHT

The trio traipse through dense forest. Orland stops and puts right hand against nearest tree. Other two gather around him.

Orland's face is covered with sweat. He arms away sheen of perspiration from forehead.

STRYKER

You all right, my friend?

ORLAND

All right. Not comfortable or happy trekking through the forest but I'll survive. I think.

Orland moves ahead. Stryker MOTIONS for Ucad to go first.

UCAD

You have an incoming electronic message on PECNET.

STRYKER

Put it on holo.

Up ahead, Orland stops and turns to see the message from Allswun: I GOT YOUR REQUEST. YES, I WILL MEET WITH YOU. I HAVE SENT NADINE, MY ASSISTANT, TO MEET YOU ON THE RIVER OF LIGHT. TO HELP HER SPOT YOU, PLEASE ADVISE ON NUMBER IN YOUR PARTY AND APPROXIMATE TIME YOU WILL REACH RIVER.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Write back and tell him we have two humans and one bot and we will reach the river right around nine point five PST.

UCAD

Two humans, one bot, approximate arrival time nine point five Parradice Standard Time. Do wish confirmation that your response was transmitted?

STRYKER

Just stay in holo mode and I can see the response for myself.

UCAD

As you desire.

Ucad, on Stryker's behalf, responds to Allswun's response.

ORLAND

I wonder if the conspirators have noticed we've left Parradice.

STRYKER

I have been wondering about that for the last fifteen short standard time units. If we're lucky, they took the same path through the forest and got devoured by that monster that spared us.

A giant black tree just ahead of them is cut in half by a BUNKER-SIZED FIREBALL. A shower of branches LITTER the ground around them.

The trio jerk their faces toward the sky. A round hovercraft, with laser guns on both sides, FIRES two more fireballs that fly right at them.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

You two follow me.

He SPRINTS toward a pair of towering, thick blue tress. Orland is on his heels. Ucad bring up rear. One fireball explodes a putter length behind them. The force knocks Ucad off balance. Bot falls forward, knocking Orland down.

The hovercraft darts down. Two more FIREBALLS erupt from their guns. Stryker darts over, grabs Orland's hand and Ucad's "foot" and YANKS them into the safety of the twin trees instants before the FIREBALLS explode into the forest floor.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

We got our answer. The bad guys know we're off the grid and they were smart enough to not go hiking through the forest from hell.

ORLAND

What now? We can't outrun that.

UCAD

My computing systems work more efficiently when I am in an upright position.

Stryker sets the bot down. Ucad is back on his "feet". Stryker brings his laser gun out.

STRYKER

We have to lure the hovercraft down closer to the ground so I can get a good shot at the pilot.

ORLAND

So what, you want Ucad and I to run out in the open and be sitting ducks while hoping you make a perfect shot with a weapon you're still learning how to use?

STRYKER

Close but not exactly. Ucad, find all the video and image files of we three that are on your hard drive. Then put them on holo.

Ten smaller rectangles of blue appear above Ucad. Stryker studies them. He POINTS EMPHATICALLY at the fourth one.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Project number four out there in the middle of that clearing.

Ucad turns and shoots out a photo of Stryker and Orland smiling and standing side-by-side with Ucad standing in front of them. The hovercraft HANGS in mid-air, then DARTS DOWN closer to the projected image.

The pilot realizes something's not right. Too late. Stryker centers the laser sights on the middle of his face and FIRES.

Pilot turns toward the real trio just in time to see Stryker's laser cannonball SPEEDING toward him.

The pilot compartment EXPLODES. Instants later, the hovercraft loses its hover. It PLUNGES to the forest floor.

ORLAND

Nice shooting.

STRYKER

Let's not wait around to see if there's any survivors.

He leads Ucad and Orland quickly away from the burning spaceship. Stryker's weapon makes noise like a fire alarm.

INSERT: SUPER:

On the aiming screen: "No ammo, no more ammo. You must recharge weapon before using it again. If no conventional power source is available, go to zzz:/weaponmasters.biz.."

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Thanks. Let's move. I don't want to keep Allwsun's assistant waiting.

Orland turns and marches ahead. Ucad follows. Stryker catches up to the bot.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Here Ucad. I need this recharged with ammunition. Go to the PECNET address on the aiming screen. There is a connecting station on the --

UCAD

(Interrupting)

I will figure it out.

Bot grabs weapon and connects port on right side of the laser gun into a slot on the bot's left side.

UCAD (V.O.)(V.O.)(CONT'D)

Weapon is charging. Estimated time remaining for complete recharge is three point seven five short standard time units. Time remaining before we are out of PECNET connection range is four point two short standard time units.

STRYKER

So we've got just enough time to finish the recharge. Sweet. I just hope we find this Nadine person.

EXT. GREAT NORTHERN FOREST - NIGHT

The trio emerge from the shadows of the forest and onto the sandy bank of the River of Light. Orland hustles over to the water's edge and cups water into his hands. He slurps water while Stryker scans the river.

STRYKER

No sign of her. But it's a long river.

ORLAND

And wet. Have a drink, my friend. You must be thirsty too.

STRYKER

Yeah, I could use some liquids.

He KNEELS DOWN, SPLASHES water in his face and drinks from the river.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

I know Parradice is supposed to have the purest drinking water in the universe but it doesn't taste as good as this.

ORLAND

Parradice has the purest drinking water of any city in the universe but it's filtered water nonetheless. Nothing can touch fresh water for taste.

From behind them, the female voice of NADINE -- 56, sun-kissed complexion, bursting with radiant energy, wears loose-fitting white robe that can't conceal serious female endowment -- startles Orland.

NADINE

That is so true.

They WHIRL around. Nadine leans over the railing of a large-putting-green-sized, rectangular boat. A forest-green wooden roof covers all but the very periphery of the vessel and the middle, where housing and a double-sailed mast stand. Marathon-thin males with bulging leg muscles PEDAL away on stationary bikes at each of the four corners.

Underneath the watercraft, also at each of the four corners, are *seacutters*, LIME-COLORED creatures with a torso like a great white shark but with limbs, and head, like a sea turtle.

NADINE (CONT'D)

You must be Stryker. I am Nadine, Allswun's assistant.

STRYKER

Nice to meet you. This my best friend Orland.

ORLAND

It is a great honor to meet an associate of the world's most renowned holy man.

NADINE

He doesn't think of himself that way. Everyone and everything is intimately connected.

(MORE)

NADINE (CONT'D)

We are really, at the deepest level, one spiritual body. Allswun isn't better or worse than anyone else. He's on a grand and mystical cosmic journey, just like all of us.

STRYKER

And this is my second-best friend, a top-notch caddy and indispensable mobile, computing assistant, Ucad.

Nadine smiles. She extends a BRONZE-COLORED hand.

NADINE

Ucad, it is a pleasure to meet you. We'll do everything in our power to keep you from falling overboard.

UCAD

Nice to meet you too. Do not worry about me. My system automatically shuts down and a protective shield is activated if more than ten percent of my surface is covered with water or any other liquid.

Nadine turns to Stryker.

NADINE

Is that true?

Stryker shrugs his surprise.

STRYKER

I didn't even know that but if Ucad says it's true, it's true.

NADINE

Well climb aboard, everyone. Let's go see Allswun.

EXT. RIVER OF LIGHT - NIGHT

Propelled by a prevailing wind, four bicyclists and four seacutters, the ship moves over the GLOWING water.

Nadine, Stryker and Orland sit in folding, director-type chairs near front of the craft. Ucad stands just to the right of Orland's chair.

NADINE

Allswun hardly ever meets with anyone. You must have a really compelling situation.

STRYKER

Too compelling for my tastes. But once you're at the bottom of a sand pit, there's nothing to do but try to climb out any way you can.

NADINE

From what I understand, you suspect there's a giant conspiracy in Parradice that's covering up the enslavement of hundreds of thousands, perhaps even a million people.

STRYKER

I didn't mention enslavement in my electronic communique to Allwsun. How'd you know about that?

NADINE

Allswun had me do a little research on our computing systems. We have a quasi-public computing system, similar to PECNET but smaller and not as well known. There is a gateway that allows our system to access PECNET's information. When you mentioned suspecting something wasn't quite right in Parradice and mentioned hundreds of thousands being affected, I thought of the missing population theory.

STRYKER

If my dearly departed friend Deeland was right, my PECNET search was purposefully distorted by the search-engine company at the request of the conspirators. All I got was an entry that dismissed it as an urban myth.

NADINE

That's skewed all right. I got thirty-pages of search results.

Stryker PACES next to the boat's railing.



STRYKER

Deeland gave me a disk with all the information he'd amassed about the missing population theory, including the suspicious deaths of four authors who published books or articles about the theory.

Nadine RAISES her eyebrows.

NADINE

Only four? My research came up with one hundred and sixty nine. Of course, one-hundred fifty-one of them didn't publish in the traditional sense. They simply posted a message on one of the PECNET or similar public computing network discussion forums. The others wrote electronic books, college papers or online articles.

Stryker stops pacing.

STRYKER

They all died shortly after they published?

NADINE

Within three lunar cycles. Mostly single-person PFU accidents and heart attacks at improbably young ages. A little over fifteen percent of the deaths were unexplained. The surviving family, if there was any, didn't want an autopsy. Didn't want to have their beloved's body cut into before the cremation ceremony.

STRYKER

Where were the authors from?

NADINE

Mostly Parradice or one its territories but also from several countries around the planet.

ORLAND

Are you sure about those figures?

NADINE

Absolutely.

ORLAND

I don't know, this whole conspiracy thing sounds farfetched. I want to hear this from Allswun himself. How long before we meet the holy man?

ALLSWUN

You already have. I'm Allwsun.

Stryker, Orland and Ucad TURN their heads toward her.

ORLAND

That's absurd. Allwsun is a man.

STRYKER

Yeah, the handful of spiritual seekers who had personal meetings with Allswun all said he was a man.

ALLSWUN

That was one of my boat-propelling specialists.

She makes SWEEPING GESTURE with right hand to indicate the four men on stationary bikes.

ALLSWUN (CONT'D)

I filled them in on that person's unique situation and told them to use their best judgment, listen with an open mind and a honest heart.

Stryker's face remains a picture of puzzlement.

STRYKER

I read those accounts. The spiritual seekers were all so impressed with the wisdom and knowledge of the man they spoke with. They all reported figuring out the answers to the deep spiritual questions they had.

ALLSWUN

(Smiling)

You'd be surprised how much one person truly listening to another person can accomplish. The answers to our problems do not come from the outside. Truth lies within us.

ORLAND

So you're saying if you just sit there and let the other person spill their guts about what's troubling them, the answer to that person's problems will become obvious?

ALLSWUN

See, you too can become a holy man.

Ahead of them, the Sea of Radiance beckons.

STRYKER

Okay, you're Allwsun. So where do you live?

Again Allwsun makes a SWEEPING GESTURE with her right hand.

ALLSWUN

This boat is my home.

STRYKER

You're just full of surprises, aren't you?

ALLSWUN

I suppose if I were truly enlightened, I would trust other people enough so that I wouldn't need to be so secretive about my home and identity.

ORLAND

Yeah, explain that, Miss Holier Than Thou.

The boat leaves the river and hits the ocean. The water GLOWS BRIGHTER than the River of Life.

ALLSWUN

I am not naive enough to think everyone has achieved enlightenment. While I try to make my life like a house with open windows through which the winds of truth blow, I know the houses of most others have shutters or at least a couple of closed windows.

Stryker NODS HIS understanding while Orland wears a SNEER of cynicism.

ALLSWUN (CONT'D)

As you can see, we've left the river for the open seas. It's beautiful and pure and honest out here.

STRYKER

So do you believe that this sea glows from the mystical energy created by all the cremated ashes dropped into it?

ALLSWUN

That is the best explanation I have heard. Scientists cannot explain it in logical, rational terms.

STRYKER

Getting back to the conspiracy, I am confused about one thing. Why didn't the government of Parradice just put these displaced, disgruntled Parradice-citizen-wannabees to death? Why go to all the trouble and expense of setting up secret slave camps?

Allswun stares at the endless expanse of water ahead of them.

ALLSWUN

You forgot a word. They set up secret slave labor camps. Perhaps instead of erasing a liability, Blackhart the First and his gang of conspirators turned the liability into an asset. Even though there were expenses, the slaves producing products for the Flawless Golfing Technology Company resulted in greater profits for the company, and for the city of Parradice.

STRYKER

Other than housing and meals, and security systems to keep them from escaping, there aren't many expenses. There's no hourly pay or benefits to worry about.

ALLSWUN

Right. But now I'm thinking the city of Parradice government may have changed their mind and are be contemplating doing what you just mentioned.

STRYKER

Killing all the slaves?

ALLSWUN

Yes.

STRYKER

What makes you say that?

She hops up and walks over to the railing on the right side of the boat.

ALLSWUN

During my thrice-daily meditation sessions, for the last about one point five lunar cycles, I've had visions of a giant demon, his enormous hands filled with screaming, crying people. The demon smiles as he throws the people into a canyon-sized fire pit.

ORLAND

Those could be random images that just popped into your head.

ALLSWUN

If it happened one or twice, I'd say the same thing. But the image keeps appearing.

STRYKER

But that vision might not have anything to do with Parradice. Maybe another regime in a different country, or even on a different planet, is about commit genocide on its enemy.

Allwsun turns to face them.

ALLSWUN

Yes, you are right. I don't have anything specific that says it's the government of Parradice. We need some kind of evidence to back up my feelings.

STRYKER

And why would the government change its mind now, after all this time?

ALLSWUN

Things change. Economic, political and technological climates change. Maybe now it makes economic sense to kill the slaves.

STRYKER

Whether your feeling is true or not, we still have to find out if the slave labor camps are real.

ALLSWUN

And if we find out they are real, that evidence, presented to the right people, will be our greatest weapon against the conspiracy.

Orland ROLLS his eyes.

ORLAND

You two are grasping at straws. Stryker, why can't you just be grateful that you have been blessed by Imall to live the city everyone else on the planet would kill to live in?

STRYKER

If it truly were a paradise, then everyone, not just a select few, would be living the perfect life. But it appears that are a whole lot of folks who are living in anything but a paradise. I can't walk away now without finding out the truth.

Orland GROANS to his feet.

ORLAND

It's been a long day. I'm exhausted. Allswun, are there sleeping quarters in there?

ALLSWUN

Yes. There is a guest room with three beds and a bathroom attached to the sleeping area. Help yourself.

ORLAND

Thank you. Stryker, we'll talk in the morning about our next move.

STRYKER

Sounds good. I'll be in soon.

Orland waves and heads inside the housing.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Well Ucad, what do you think? What's the answer?

UCAD

Elementary. You need video of the slave camp in operation. Once that is attained, transmit video to a well-known news-gathering organization not in Parradice.

STRYKER

It's not that simple. We can't just walk in there and start filming.

ALLSWUN

A human couldn't but a bot, if disguised as a worker bot, might.

She NODS EMPHATICALLY at Ucad. Stryker smiles. He puts his hands on Ucad's shoulders.

STRYKER

My friend, I've got a mission for you. You will have the honor and opportunity of a lifetime.

UCAD

Despite the fact I have returned my communications-style settings to the factory settings, I must point out my systems work best in non-hostile environments.

STRYKER

Thanks for your input. It has been acknowledged and duly ignored. Ucad, it's time to bot up and do what's right for the universe.

UCAD

Of course. Whatever you wish me to do, I will do it.

STRYKER

That's the spirt, Ucad. Now we need to figure out how you can reach the subterranean level so you can get video of the slave operation. Ucad, search PECNET for any architectural drawings or blueprints of the Flawless Golfing Products Company's headquarters.

UCAD

Will do. On holo, I presume.

STRYKER

Yes, please.

A BLUE RECTANGLE above the bot shows five hits.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Ucad, analyze the results and provide a summary. Key point: possible access points to the subterranean level of the corporate headquarters in Parradice.

Blue hologram CHANGES at nearly the speed of light as Ucad blazes through the results.

UCAD

I have the analysis ready.

STRYKER

Go ahead.

UCAD

There is a standard vertical relocation unit (VRU) that provides transport to floors one through twenty and a subterranean level. Company literature states there are no production or office facilities on the below-ground level. The company processes garbage received from chutes in the building and recycles processed material as fuel. All garbage chutes feed into a single large container.

STRYKER

That's it. Ucad, that's your ticket to the ball.



UCAD

Ball? Please explain.

STRYKER

I mean that's your way in to get video of the slave-labor camp.

UCAD

I would prefer a nice clean way such as the VRU.

STRYKER

You'd have to explain why you're going to that level plus you probably need an access code, which we don't have.

UCAD

Your logic is irrefutable. Bring on the garbage.

EXT. WOODS BY FLAWLESS GOLFING TECHNOLOGY FACTORY IN PARRADICE - DAY

Stryker, Orland and Ucad stand in copse of VIOLET and BLUE-colored trees. In back of the plant, about FORTY WORKERS (mixed ages) take their afternoon break. Stryker POINTS at a young male worker smoking a nicotine dispenser. Worker bot stands next to him.

STRYKER

I'm going after those two.

Stryker BURSTS out of the trees. He slows down to a BRISK WALK The worker on the edge of the group with the nicotine dispenser, his name tag reads DAGMAR - EMPLOYEE #99399, STARES DOWN Stryker as Stryker reaches him.

He MOTIONS for Dagmar to separate himself and his worker bot from the crowd.

STRYKER (Softly) (CONT'D)

Dagmar, I'm Deeland Greening. I'm doing an investigative story for Cosmic Newsgroup out of Volcano View City. I need to disguise myself as a regular worker so I find out what really goes on inside the planet's most efficient and successful golf products company.

DAGMAR

What does that have to do with me?

STRYKER

I need your ID badge and some information from you. Like where you work and what you do. Don't worry, I won't give out your name. And I'll pay you two weeks' wages.

Stryker sticks a WAD OF BILLS into Dagmar's right hand. He GLANCES CASUALLY at the money.

DAGMAR

Uh, well, okay, I mean it's not like I need the money but hell, it's like a mini-vacation. I work in the products-testing area. I test the clubs made on the assembly line. Either it's an acceptance or rejection. After I go through twenty clubs, my bot hauls them over and puts them in the acceptance or the rejection bin.

STRYKER

What about your supervisor?

DAGMAR

He only shows up if I don't make quota, which is forty clubs per long STU.

STRYKER

I'll be sure to make quota then. All right, Dagmar. I really appreciate this.

He POINTS at Dagmar's ID badge. Dagmar takes it off and hands it to Stryker. He grabs his bot assistant's ID badge.

DAGMAR

(To his assistant bot)  
We got the rest of the day off. These two are filling in for us.

ASSISTANT BOT

What is the meaning of this?

DAGMAR

The why isn't important. Just don't mention this to anyone else.

The BACK TO WORK HORN sounds.

STRYKER  
 (To Ucad)  
 Alright, big guy, it's time to go  
 to work.

He hangs ID badge around bot's neck and Dagmar's ID badge  
 around his own.

UCAD  
 Go ahead, Dagmar. I'm right behind  
 you.

STRYKER  
 You catch on quick, my friend.

Stryker and Ucad follow the crowd toward the rear entrance.  
 Dagmar and his bot break off from the others, turn around and  
 head for the employee parking lot in the back of the factory.

INT. FLAWLESS GOLFING TECHNOLOGY HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Stryker and Ucad follow group of factory workers toward  
 production area. Stryker points out the mens room on left  
 side of the hallway just before the hallway leading to the  
 production area.

STRYKER  
 Follow me into the men's room.

UCAD  
 I've never been in one.

STRYKER  
 You can put this in your bot diary.

Stryker pushes the door open. Ucad motors in behind him.

Three men are the trough and two of the stalls are in use.  
 Stryker shakes his head no.

STRYKER (CONT'D)  
 Too busy. Time for Plan B.

They exit rest room. Stryker leads Ucad past the intersecting  
 hallway. The last door on the left has LED sign reading  
 JANITOR'S CLOSET. Electronic keypad is attached to door.

STRYKER (CONT'D)  
 Any ideas on what the access code  
 could be?

## UCAD

It is a *Security Systems Plus X Nine-Thousand*. Access codes for this type of lock are typically five to seven digits long, often beginning with a two or three.

A male production worker comes out of rest room and heads toward them. He hesitates after seeing them. Stryker throws up a NERVOUS WAVE and smiles broadly. Worker smiles and turns to his left toward production area.

## STRYKER

Great, we think the first number is a two or three but we have no idea about the other four to six.

Another worker comes out of the rest room. Stryker acts like he's in a thoughtful discussion with his bot. He sneaks a glance back down the hallway. Worker has turned to go to production area.

## STRYKER (CONT'D)

We don't have time to cycle through all the number combinations.

He brings out laser gun, holds it against right leg, and glances down corridor. Two men emerge from rest room. They FROWN at Stryker and Ucad, then disappear down hallway towards factory.

## STRYKER (CONT'D)

Stand back, Ucad. We're getting into this room the quick way.

He checks the men's room door. Nobody coming out. Stryker FIRES laser gun at top of door. The top half COMES OFF hinges. He blows the bottom half of door off other hinges.

Door, with huge holes in top and bottom, falls onto floor of janitor's closer. Stryker and Ucad zip inside.

There is a shelf of cleaning supplies mounted to wall above a large drain. Three powered-off janitorial bots stand shoulder-to-shoulder next to the drain.

Farther into the room is a metal panel built into the wall. Sign above it: REFUSE DISPOSAL.

Stryker looks at Ucad, then back at the size of the chute.

## STRYKER (CONT'D)

It'll be close but I think you'll fit. Come one over here.

Ucad motors over next to chute. Stryker opens chute.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Now remember, gather just as much evidence as you need to and then get the hell out of there. I'll check up on you as much as I can with my PCD. Problem is I have to meet Dagmar's quota or his supervisor will show up.

He picks up Ucad and muscles bot head-first into metal chute. Stryker tries to shove Ucad down the chute but bot is stuck.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Good Imall, you should have gone Chameleon after fall. Okay, I know.

He hustles over to the cleaning supplies shelf and grabs a bottle of liquid cleaner. Stryker SQUIRTS the cleaner into the chute where the metal meets Ucad's shoulders and back.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

How are you doing, buddy?

UCAD

I feel like a golf ball in a ball washer.

STRYKER

That's just the kind of sense of humor you're going to need to get through this.

He whips out laser gun, EXPANDS it to bazooka size and turns it around. Stryker BASHES Ucad in its upper back.

UCAD

Bot abuse never solves anything.

STRYKER

I'm not trying to hurt you.

He BASHES Ucad three times in quick succession. Bot moves ahead slightly. Stryker rears back and REALLY CLOBBERS Ucad. The bot inches farther into the chute.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

I'm trying to help you.

He STRIKES the bot again. Ucad takes off down the chute and is out of sight. Unintelligible bot SCREAMS echo in the chute.

STRYKER (CONT'D)  
(To self)

I'm sure he was thanking me for  
getting him loose.

He grabs a CLOSED FOR CLEANING sign, tapes it to the door and leans the unhinged, double-holed door in the doorway. Stryker laughs after seeing how ridiculous it looks. He HUSTLES toward the factory area.

INT. REFUSE CONTAINER IN SUBTERRANEAN LEVEL - DAY

Over a hundred metal chutes converge in the center of the par-three-sized container. The walls are three putter-lengths high. HEAPS OF REFUSE have reached three-quarters of the way up the wall in some places.

Ucad drops out of a chute and PLOPS into the midst of a collection of plastic garbage bags filled with refuse from the office area.

Ucad PUSHES a bag of garbage away from him.

UCAD (V.O.)  
(To self)

Next time Stryker can do his own  
dirty work.

Bot climbs the highest garbage heap and looks out over the wall. Hundreds of MEN AND WOMEN (mixed ages) in shackles stand at five assembly lines. Three eight-foot-tall supervisor bots oversee the operation. An elderly female on assembly line, face covered with sweat, chest heaving, FAINTS AND FALLS onto the floor. Supervisor bot strides up the unconscious woman, unshackles her, picks up body and hauls over to a two putter-length wide trench. Bot TOSSES the body into the trench.

INT. PARRADICE POLICING AGENT STATION - DAY

CAPTAIN HEADY PHILLIPS -- 48, thin, unreadable eyes, thoughtful and calculating aura -- studies report on computer screen while writing e-message. PCD on desk BEEPS.

RECEPTIONIST BOT (V.O.)  
Captain, you have a visitor.

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS  
I don't have any appointments on my  
calendar. Tell them to make an --

RECEPTIONIST BOT (V.O.)  
 (Interrupting)  
 I'm sorry, sir, but you may want to  
 reconsider seeing him.

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS  
 Who in the hell is it and what does  
 he want?

RECEPTIONIST BOT (V.O.)  
 It's Ian Blackhart.

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS  
 What?!

He's on his feet behind the desk.

RECEPTIONIST BOT (V.O.)  
 He's half dressed, quite possibly  
 under the influence of a mind-  
 altering substance and really --

Door to office FLIES OPEN. Shirtless and EYES WILD from the  
 Mystic drug.

RECEPTIONIST BOT (V.O.)  
 Upset.

Ian STORMS toward the captain JABBING finger at Heady.

IAN  
 Where in the fuck is Stryker and  
 his chubby friend?

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS  
 Don't forget the bot Ucad.

IAN  
 Whatever. You were supposed to have  
 found and imprisoned or killed them  
 by now.

Ian puts both palms in the middle of desk and leans into  
 Heady's face.

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS  
 Uh, well sir, after the first  
 hovercraft was shot down and the  
 team on board killed with some kind  
 of laser cannon, I sent my best  
 man, I mean person, Lieutenant  
 Kiell, to find them.

IAN

And?

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS

No sign of them in the Great Northern Forest. I dispatched two-hundred plainclothes agents to canvas the city plus I put on extra uniformed policing agents to patrol the golf course. No sign of them anywhere.

IAN

What about on the Sea of Radiance?

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS

Not in our jurisdiction plus we don't have the manpower.

IAN

Call Captain Concourse from the Planetary Union of Nations Security Force. He'll dispatch a search team to track down the fugitives.

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS

Yes sir.

Blackhart stays in Phillips' face.

IAN

And Heady, the instant you find them, you tell me. If they're in the city, I'm going to deal with them personally.

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS

Understood.

Blackhart WHIRLS and STRIDES UNEVENLY for the door.

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Sir, would you like an escort back to, ah, wherever you came from?

IAN

I'll walk back to my executive suite. It will feel like I'm flying but I'll be on foot. Know what I mean, Heady old sport?

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS

I think so, sir. You're having a mystifying experience again, right?



Blackhart halts. He turns around wearing a grin that seems larger than his face can hold.

IAN

Very good, Heady. Yes, I'm expanding the already expansive limits of my historic mind. Your staff should try Mystic, when they're off duty of course. It will give them a new perspective on law and order.

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS

Good idea, sir. I will give that serious thought.

IAN

Head, you are so full of fucking shit. But you suck up to your bosses better than anyone I know. That's why I like you.

Blackhart skips out of the office WHISTLING a tune. Heady JUMPS UP, RUNS OVER and shuts the door to his office.

INT. FLAWLESS GOLFING TECHNOLOGY FACTORY AREA - DAY

Stryker glances around his work area. A plastic barrel overflows with golf clubs. He grabs a hybrid iron, SWINGS it and leans it against a nearby desk.

STRYKER

(To self)

Looks good.

He grabs a roll of labels that say APPROVED BY EMPLOYEE #99399. He takes one and sticks on shaft of the club.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

(To self)

Time's wasting. Gotta make quota.

He grabs a handful of clubs out of the barrel and quickly sticks APPROVED stickers on each. Stryker looks around. He spots another inspector's assistant bot taking a dozen or so clubs from the inspector. The bot hauls them over and deposits all but one of the clubs into a plastic barrel marked INSPECTED AND APPROVED. The other club goes into a barrel marked REJECTS.

Stryker hurries over with his batch of clubs and deposits them into the barrel.

MALE VOICE

Why isn't your bot doing that?

Stryker turns to find MR. GRABOWSKI -- 38, black golf shorts and polo shirt with company insignias on each, MANAGER on name tag, expert at covering his ass -- glaring at him.

STRYKER

I, ah, am doing an experiment. My theory is that I will improve my production by at least ten percent if I bring the clubs over to the barrel myself. That's because I move at least twenty percent faster than my bot assistant.

MR. GRABOWSKI

You have to factor in time spent carrying clubs to and from your work area.

STRYKER

I have. I believe the net result will be an increase in productivity. But the only way to prove that is to try it and measure the results.

MR. GRABOWSKI

I like the way you think, ah, Dagmar. I don't recall speaking with you before.

STRYKER

It's big, busy place, lot going on.

MR. GRABOWSKI

Right. Well I won't detain you any longer. Keep up the good work, Dagmar. If your theory is true, maybe we'll change the standard procedures for all inspectors.

STRYKER

That would be great. Thanks, Mr. G. I gotta get back to work.

He turns and jogs back to his work area. Stryker watches Mr. Grabowski get into a discussion with another manager. As soon as Grabowski's back is turned, Stryker RUSHES toward the door leading out of the factory area.

INT. FLAWLESS GOLFING TECHNOLOGY HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Stryker emerges in the corridor. He approaches intersecting hallway with janitor's closet on one side (left side) and men's room on the other side (right side).

He turns right and heads for men's room. Storming down the hallway toward him are FOUR SECURITY DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL (mixed ages).

The one leading the pack is BEN STONEMAN -- square jaw, snarly expression, balls of steel. He speaks into shoulder microphone.

STONEMAN

We're almost to the break-in point.  
Will keep you updated.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE (V.O.)

If there really is an intruder, use  
whatever force necessary to keep  
them from escaping. Your job  
depends on it.

STONEMAN

Yes sir. I understand.

Stryker DUCKS into the rest room. One man is at the trough. Stryker hustles into the farthest stall and shuts door. He uses PCD to link to Ucad.

PCD screen shows his beloved bot disguised as a janitorial bot. Ucad MOTORS through production area of slave-labor camp with two mops and Squeegee in holders instead of golf clubs.

He pushes button on device and a HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE appears on stall door. Another button push and the sound is muted and TEXT APPEARS underneath video images.

Two supervisors, one human and one bot, stand side by side while watching slaves on the assembly line. Ucad PRETENDS to clean the floor several paces away from the pair.

BOT SUPERVISOR

When does the transition begin?

HUMAN SUPERVISOR

Two day-night cycles from now. It's  
about damn time. I'm so sick of  
filling out all the paperwork for  
the ones that die on the job.

BOT SUPERVISOR

Plus no more worries about escaped slaves.

HUMAN SUPERVISOR

Or feeding or housing the Sons of a Bitches.

BOT SUPERVISOR

Is the termination mechanism ready?

HUMAN SUPERVISOR

Management claims it is. They're going to convert the garbage dumps into temporary fire pits. Cranes will drop the obsolete workers into the fire pits. The smoke from the fire pits will be blown by giant fans into flexible, hollow pipes that will ultimately vent the smoke outside.

BOT SUPERVISOR

Do they need help with the project?

HUMAN SUPERVISOR

Unfortunately not. I know you were thinking of getting OT pay like I was but no such luck.

Ucad stops scrubbing the floor. The bot ROLLS toward the VRU door. Stryker nods his approval.

He hits a button on the PCD. A HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE of a keyboard appears on the stall door. Stryker types out message:

INSERT: SUPER:

"I'll be waiting for you outside the VRU on the first floor. Don't stop to talk anyone. Understand?"

Ucad's response: "Yes."

BACK TO SCENE

Stryker uses PCD to bring up Orland. He uses keyboard.

INSERT: SUPER:

"Be ready right outside the rear entrance with the multi-passenger flying unit I pray you were able to rent."

Orland responds, "I'm ready and waiting."

BACK TO SCENE

Stryker ends call and pockets the device. He hops up and leaves the stall. He opens rest-room door and PEEKS around the corner toward the janitor's closet.

Stomping down the corridor is the same four security personnel. Stoneman leads the way.

STONEMAN

(Into mic)

Some type of laser gun was used to gain entry to the room. I am leading my men to the production area right now.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Don't fail me.

STONEMAN

(Into mic)

Yes sir.

Stryker waits until the four turn into hallway leading to the factory area, then BURSTS OUT of the men's room and SPRINTS down hallway.

GASPING FOR BREATH, Stryker emerges in main lobby. The VRU is on his left, the reception area to his right. The MALE RECEPTIONIST FROWNS at the breathless Stryker. He reads the employee ID badge hanging around his neck.

MALE RECEPTIONIST

Dagmar, you're from production, right?

STRYKER

That's right. I'm using personal time so I'm leaving a little early.

MALE RECEPTIONIST

Sure, sure. But let me check the system to make sure the time-off request is properly recorded.

He turns and whispers something to the nearest security guard. Guard nods, turns away and says something into his shoulder microphone. He leans over and says something to the receptionist.

MALE RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Dagmar, I need to get some information from you.

Stryker glances at the VRU. Door opens. Ucad ROLLS out.

STRYKER

I'd like to help you out but I've got to go.

MALE RECEPTIONIST

You can't leave yet.

Security guard reaches for his gun. Stryker PULLS out his laser gun and SHOOTS a blast that HITS the guard in the chest. He FALLS OVER dead.

STRYKER

That's where you're wrong.

He WHIRLS and RUSHES over to Ucad.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Orland is waiting outside. Go Chameleon and then I'll carry you. It'll be faster that way.

UCAD

You got it. Going into Chameleon, no, correction. System conflict, system conflict, unable to enter Chameleon mode due to incompatible requests.

STRYKER

What are you talking about? How can there be a conflict? You're my bot. Now go Chameleon.

Ucad shakes his head 'no'. Stoneman leads NINE OTHER SECURITY PERSONNEL (mixed ages) into lobby.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

I don't have time to figure this out. You must have a virus from an incoming PECNET message or something. Okay, jump on my back.

He CROUCHES DOWN in front of the bot. Stoneman and company RUN toward them with WEAPONS DRAWN. Stryker enlarges gun into a bazooka and FIRES a shot that hits the floor right in front of Stoneman. The force from the blast KNOCKS them off their feet.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Come on, Ucad. Get on my back now!

Bot wraps titanium arms around Stryker's waist as security forces struggle to their feet. Stryker SPRINTS toward rear entrance.

A laser blast glances off Stryker's left hip. Another catches him on the back of the knee. He stumbles but BARELY KEEPS HIS BALANCE.

Two strides from door, a laser blast HITS Ucad in the middle of the back. The force of the blast PROPELS the pair out the door.

Breathless, covered in sweat and injured, Stryker totes Ucad toward the flying unit piloted by Orland.

ORLAND

What in the hell are you doing?

STRYKER

What does it look like? I'm carrying Ucad because for some reason, a virus, whatever, his systems told him not to go Chameleon.

Ucad CLIMBS OFF Stryker's back. Stryker grabs Ucad and hefts the bot into the very rear seat. GRIMACING through the pain, he climbs into the middle seat of the flying unit.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Go!

Rear doors BURST OPEN. Guards come out FIRING every weapon they have. Three BLASTS whiz through air within SSLU of Stryker's face.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Have you g one deaf? Go!

Orland guns it. Craft RISES and accelerates away from the frustrated security personnel.

EXT. PARRADICE GOLF COURSE - DAY

Orland, Stryker and Ucad climb down from flying unit and onto the tee of the twentieth and final hole.

The U-shaped hole begins on the edge of a cliff that leads to the beach next to the Sea of Radiance far below. Four island fairways have been attached to the side of the cliff. First two shots are hit downward, the next three go back up to a green perched precariously on edge of precipice. A gondola transports players up and down the hole's length.

Stryker shakes his head in dismay as he examines the circuitry sticking out of the hole in his bot's back.

STRYKER

What's the damage assessment from the shot to your back?

UCAD

Minimal damage. Primary computing software and hardware intact. Periphery damage being repaired. Estimated time of completion is one point five standard time units.

STRYKER

So your video files are intact?

UCAD

Affirmative.

STRYKER

Great. We're close enough to a wireless tower. Send the video file of the Flawless Golfing Technology Products slave operation and Deeland's file along with an electronic message to the Cosmic Newsgroup. Once the story of the Parradice conspiracy is broken, the international community will arrest the whole lot of the bastards.

Ten policing-agent units SPEED THROUGH AIR toward them.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Uh-oh, we've got company. No time to waste. Send the file, Ucad.

ORLAND

Don't send that file, Ucad.

Orland reaches into front seat of flying unit and takes out three-bladed knife-gun combination.

STRYKER

What are you doing?

ORLAND

Ucad, stay off PECNET. You are to motor your computing self right off the cliff.



Approaching crafts slow and descend twenty SSLU's away. Ian Blackhart, flanked by uniformed agents, step off the lead craft. Other nine units, each carrying policing agents, land. All the agents climb out, draw their weapons and AIM them at Stryker.

IAN

Well well, we finally meet face to face. I trust you know who I am.

ORLAND

I'm not with him. I was about to have the bot walk off the edge of the cliff so the evidence of the slave camp will be destroyed.

STRYKER

(To Orland)

I can't believe it. You're part of the cover-up?

ORLAND

It's not like that. I was never directly involved but my dad has told me, without ever coming right out and saying it, that there's been something unofficial going on under the surface of Parradice for a long time.

Stryker draws his weapon and POINTS IT at Orland.

STRYKER

So you told Ucad not to go into Chameleon mode back at Flawless Technology?

ORLAND

I did. You see, I changed Ucad's set-up last night while we were on Allswun's boat. I pretended to be asleep when you came into the guest room. After you fell asleep, I snuck out and changed Ucad's system. He was to obey your commands but if there was a conflict between my command and yours, he obeys mine.

STRYKER

You are something else. So back in the Great Northern Forest, you weren't being brave.

(MORE)

STRYKER (CONT'D)

You were trying to get me and Ucad killed by that creature from hell while you slithered away like a snake.

ORLAND

That was the plan.

Ian Blackhart takes a step toward Stryker. The serpent amulet GLOWS BLOOD RED. Three snakes, each at least ten SSLU's long with heads the twice the size of a human's, spring up from the amulet. Their tails are WRAPPED around Ian's neck.

The middle snake, fangs bared, SHOOTs FORWARD at Stryker's face. Stryker fires gun. The fireball blows the giant snake away. Its tail loses tension and falls away from Ian's neck.

Ian holds up a hand to stop the agents from firing.

Stryker's gun BEEPS. On the aiming screen: AMMUNITION LEVEL CRITICALLY LOW. YOU MUST RECHARGE SOON. ENOUGH ENERGY FOR ONE MORE SHOT.

ORLAND (CONT'D)

Uh-oh, I bet you're running low on ammo aren't you?

STRYKER

No, my gun just likes to chit chat.

ORLAND

Alright Ucad, we're done messing around. Go over the edge of that cliff and ignore anything Stryker says to you.

STRYKER

Ucad, send the files to the Cosmic Newsgroup.

The bot takes a final look at Stryker, TURNS and takes off toward the cliff's edge.

ORLAND

That's more like it. Technology mixed with a worthy goal is a beautiful thing.

Stryker RUNS after the bot YELLING his name. Ucad disappears over the edge. Stryker stops at the very edge. He STARES for several beats, then turns around and retreats a couple steps from the drop off.

Orland and Blackhart, along with the fifty policing agents, have moved several SSLU's closer. Stryker, laser bazooka in right hand but not pointed at anyone, glares at Orland. He shifts look of loathing to Blackhart. Above Blackhart, the two remaining snakes BARE THEIR FANGS.

Stryker switches gaze back at Orland. He brings gun up and POINTS barrel at someone who used to be his friend. Orland aims knife-gun at Stryker.

IAN

Looks like you're outnumbered. You might as well give up. Any evidence you had about the slave operation is gone. Parradice is preserved.

Stryker's shoulders SAG. He LOWERS his weapon, takes a step backwards toward the precipice.

STRYKER

I can't believe I went through all that, got so close, and it's come to this. Cornered by pieces of human sewage like you two.

Stryker retreats one more step.

IAN

What's it going to be, knife blades or snake fangs?

STRYKER

Or I could be like Ucad and just walk off the cliff.

IAN

It'd save us the trouble of having to kill you. It's your choice.

STRYKER

Yeah, I'd prefer to die by my own hand than one of your filthy ones.

He lowers his gaze in resignation. Stryker jerks his head, and his gun, up. Police have guns pointed at him in case he tries to shoot Ian. He aims the bazooka at Orland.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

But not before I see you die.

He FIRES a laser blast that separates Orland's head from his torso. The knife-gun falls to the ground. Orland's shocked face lands right next to it. Stryker drops bazooka on ground.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Alright, I'm out of ammo. You win. But you can't keep your dirty secrets hidden forever. One day someone's going to blow the whistle on your hellish operation.

IAN

Actually there will soon be nothing to hide. After the mass exterminations end, there will be no more slave-labor operations. Bots will replace the human workers. It'll all be perfectly legal and above board.

STRYKER

Got it all figured out, don't you?

Ian smiles smugly.

IAN

Damn right I do.

STRYKER

May you rot in hell.

Stryker TURNS, takes a step, and JUMPS OFF the cliff. Ian chuckles. The giant snakes shrink and FLY BACK into the amulet. Ian addresses Lieutenant Kiell.

IAN

Your work is done here. I won't need a ride back to my office. I have decided to play the twentieth hole and walk back to the city center. On your way back to the station, call Heady and tell him the exterminations will begin tomorrow as scheduled.

LIEUTENANT KIELL

Yes sir.

She motions for the other units to follow her as she climbs into the lead unit, which then rises and flies away from the hole.

Ian walks over to the portable pro shop five SSLU's to the right of the tees. He enters a code on a keypad that deactivates a protective laser shield. Ian grabs a driver, hybrid and putter from the rack. He enters code again. Protective laser shield REAPPEARS.

He GRABS a ball out of a small circular water fountain and takes a tee out of a peg attached to the fountain's side. Ian eyes the shot, takes a PRACTICE SWING, steps up and HITS AWAY.

Ian smirks and nods his self-satisfaction. He reaches down to pick up the other two clubs. He freezes after hearing a voice from behind him.

STRYKER

(Yelling)

Hey Ian, this is for Deeland.

Blackhart, a FROWN of confusion on his face, TURNS AROUND.

IAN

What the he --

He's speechless. Blackhart tries to take it all in. Stryker holds a golf club in his hands like he's just hit a shot. Ucad, a small propeller sticking out of the top of his head, HOVERS in mid air behind Stryker.

And screaming through the air, coming right at him, is an orange and white golf ball. The orb strikes Blackhart squarely in the middle of the forehead.

Blackhart FALLS onto his back. His dead, confused face STARES at the sky.

UCAD

That's the best shot you'll ever hit.

EXT. PARRADICE GOLF COURSE - PRACTICE AREA - DAY

Ucad watches as Stryker HITS a drive. Stryker GRIMACES.

STRYKER

Yikes, I've got to get rid of that hook. The patrons at The Gallery bar will be running for cover when they see me.

UCAD

At least the customers on the right side of the hole will be safe.

Stryker MOTIONS for Ucad to toss him another ball. Bot does so. Stryker tees it up.

STRYKER

As usual, your insight is right on and indisputable. I'm so happy that after your heroics to save not only me but over a million slaves from being murdered, that bots are now officially recognized as citizens.

UCAD

It makes sense. Over the thousands of POATS that have passed, we have evolved into much more than mobile computing stations. If we hadn't, I would have done exactly as programmed by Orland. But the degree of evolution is largely dependent on the bot's owner.

STRYKER

True. It's like a parent-child relationship.

He BELTS another drive. Stryker nods approvingly.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Much better.

He turns to Ucad. Bot tosses another ball. He tees it up.

UCAD

Pro shop attendant just sent e-message stating estimated time of tee-off is in twenty-seven point five short STU's.

STRYKER

Thank you.

He hits another drive. Ball FLIES long and straight.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Sweet.

He turns to Ucad.

UCAD

Your tee time would not be delayed at all at eight-six percent of other courses around the planet. Are you sure about staying in Parradice?

Bot TOSSES a ball toward its owner.

STRYKER

Yes, I am. I originally planned to travel the planet and study other cultures, especially political systems. But now I want to stay here to see what happens with our own governmental, economic and business infrastructures.

He tees up and addresses the ball.

UCAD

Based on the PECNET buzz, it is total chaos. The city is overcrowded, the central bank account is almost out of funds and there's no functional government body to provide direction.

STRYKER

Transitions from the old to the new are always challenging. But it'll work out somehow.

He HITS another drive. This one is shorter and SLICES BADLY.

STRYKER (CONT'D)

Hopefully better than that drive.

EXT. PARRADICE GOLF COURSE - PRACTICE AREA - DAY

Four tees to the right of Stryker and Ucad, TERENCE DALY -- 47, male, over six feet, serious spare tire, oozes crankiness -- scowls at his ROBOTIC CADDY.

TERENCE

How much longer before we tee off?

ROBOTIC CADDY

About thirty-two short STU's.

TERENCE

This is insane. The city has gone to hell since the population limit was repealed. It's anarchy. Rioting in the streets can't be far off.

ROBOTIC CADDY

Would you like to read the latest news articles from PECNET?

Terence WAVES OFF the idea.

TERENCE

No, I don't need the media telling me what I already know. I'm telling you, if the city of Parradice ratifies that completely representative form of self-government, it'll be the beginning of the end.

A STRANGER to Terence's right, in the practice tee adjacent to his, turns toward Terence. The stranger has a HOLOGRAM OF A NORMAL FACE covering his real face. Only the eyes are real.

STRANGER

You mean the preposterous proposal to let the citizenry vote via the PECNET on city issues instead of letting government leaders do their job?

Terence nods 'yes'. He FROWNS at the hologram.

TERENCE

Yeah, that's the one. What's with your face?

STRANGER

My house caught on fire during the middle of the night. I was lucky to escape with my life. But most of my face was burned off. Thank Imall that the fire spared my eyes.

Terence NUDGES a range ball into position.

TERENCE

Right. If Imall really exists, He works in ways I frankly don't always understand.

STRANGER

Don't worry, my friend, Imall is very real. He has wondrous things in mind for Parradice, and in particular, for you.

Terence scoffs, then HITS a practice shot.

TERENCE

You got me confused with someone else.

The stranger glances at Terence's bot. On the side of the computerized caddy is a LED with Terence's name.



STRANGER

No, Terence Daly, I do not. I have presented you with a challenging but exciting opportunity. With the right adviser and a powerful talisman, you could be the visionary who brings paradise back to Parradice.

TERENCE

What are you, a political-science major or something?

STRANGER

Let's just say I've got more knowledge and experience understanding how the human mind and soul works than anyone on the planet. If I looked prettier, I'd take on the challenge myself.

Terence's bot TOSSES a ball to him. He sets the ball in front of him.

TERENCE

Alright, what kind of talisman are you talking about?

The stranger walks over to Terence, looks around at the surrounding players and extracts from his shirt pocket a NECKLACE WITH A BLACK ORB hanging from it. He holds the necklace in front of Terence.

The orb ROTATES slowly without any help from the stranger. Tiny flashes of energy SPARKLE on the orb's blackness. Terence studies the orb with great interest as it slowly revolves like a miniature planet.

STRANGER

And if you press the top of it...

He presses on the top of the orb. As it turns, the orb CHANGES COLOR AND SHAPE. It's now an oval-shaped mirror. Stranger holds it so Terence can see his REFLECTION.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

Now you can see the beauty and majesty of the man who's going to alter the course of Parradice. Imagine yourself in the spotlight leading the people out of the darkness of chaos.

Terence's eyes take on a distant look as he nods slowly at the image in his mind.

The stranger presses the middle of the mirror. It REVOLVES slowly on the necklace, TRANSFORMING as it rotates, back into the black orb.

Stranger drapes the orbed necklace around Terence's neck.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

There we go. You and the talisman  
were made for each other.

Terence feels the orb with his thumb and right index finger. Stranger hands a PCD to Terence.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

If you ever need any advice, call  
me. The device has only one number  
in its database. Mine.

TERENCE

But how do I keep the self-  
government proposal from being  
implemented in Parradice?

STRANGER

That's simple. You propose a two-  
party political system. One party  
has liberal ideas while the other  
is conservative, so that every  
citizen is, in theory, represented.

TERENCE

Which party should I be in?

STRANGER

Doesn't really matter. Just choose  
one, be consistent with your  
stances on issues, tell the people  
how much you value their ideas and  
that all you care about is making  
Parradice the best place on the  
planet to live.

TERENCE

But what if I make mistakes that  
make life worse in Parradice?

STRANGER

A successful politician is just  
like hitting an approach shot to  
the twentieth green. If you spin it  
right, you'll stick around.

He snakes his arm across Terence's back and grabs his by the left shoulder.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

Don't worry, you'll do great. I'm all on your side, as am I. Remember, call me whenever you need answers.

TERENCE

I will. But I don't know what to call you.

Stranger begins to walk away.

STRANGER

Call me The Advisor. Take care, my friend. And be ready to do great things.

He walks briskly away from Terence. Later on, as the stranger walks past Stryker and Ucad, he WHISTLES TUNE FROM "HIGHWAY TO HELL". Closer to the clubhouse, the stranger's walk turns into a SKIP.

FADE OUT.

THE END.

