

CHAPTER II--Adventures in the Hall

THE KIDS IN THE HALL

As they walk to pick up the equipment, Mick says encouragingly to Green, "Good Citizen, you don't know how much it pleases me that you have an interest in my position. But as we all know, I'm the morale officer and I know the duties of my job. You'll just have to trust me on the Cranial Cap; it is His Will that you wear one. Oooh, let me add the Cranial Cap to my list." With that Mick yanks the pad out from the depths of his uniform and begins writing.

Everyone has moved out into the hall with minimal fanfare. King says, "PLC is right here. I'm taking five for a potty break. Take a few minutes, and everyone meet here in ten." He dashes off around a corner, orange braid flapping ostentatiously with his stride.

Mick stands for a moment in obvious pain, and then begins writing again as the attack passes.

MICK'S DOING IT AGAIN

Mick suddenly explodes with activity. Wildly yanking a page from his notebook

Mick simultaneously pulls his pistol (careful to unlock the safety), throws the paper to the ground, and yells, "OH MY, HOW IN ALPHA COMPLEX DID THAT HAPPEN!" as he fires repeatedly at point blank range at the piece of paper.

CHRISTOPH IS A LITTLE ON EDGE

As Mick finishes unloading his entire laser barrel into the offending journal page, Christoph draws his laser and fires twice on Mick's head from point blank range.

The first shot is absorbed by the shoulder pads of Mick's reflex armor, stunning him temporarily. As he falls back, the second shot takes him in the neck, and he crumples to the floor, his spent laser aimed impotently at the somber Christoph, his other hand clutching his journal. Strangely, Mick does not seem surprised.

Christoph sees that the paper on the floor has crumbled to ash. "Damn," he mutters, and prepares to take aim at the fallen Mick.

MICK SPEAKS

Christoph still has his laser leveled at the prone Mick, but he hesitates a moment.

Mick's own spent laser falls limply from his grasp and clatters softly on the white tile. Mick's face contorts under the fluorescent lighting, and with a sudden (although weak) burst of energy, he stuffs his pad deep into his uniform and out of sight, all the while still on the floor. He shouts, "I hereby relinquish all of my possessions, ESPECIALLY MY PAD, and transfer my ownership..."

Mick is still going on, but he's very long-winded. More later (if he can).

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Mick was saying:

"I hereby relinquish all of my possessions, ESPECIALLY MY PAD, and transfer my ownership rights solely to Mick-R- THY-2, my next clone."

Green distractedly picks up Mick's fallen laser, and acting as if he doesn't even notice that Mick is still talking, he fires twice at Mick's legs, grimacing at the dry click of an empty barrel.

Staring pointedly at Green, Mick continues: "Delivery may only take place from my own hands, either dead or alive. Any attempt to take any of my possessions by any one other than my clone..."

At this point, Green has discarded the spent laser, and is casually feeling around inside Mick's jacket--obviously searching for something specific.

Maury has picked up the discarded gun and is now unscrewing the wasted barrel as he inspects the weapon.

PICKING UP... (CONTINUED)

As all this is going on, Fonz merely observes. Christoph still has his pistol ready, but has lowered it some as Mick does not appear to be resisting (or for that matter, able to move much at all).

OH MY STARS & GARTERS--HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

Mick's speech trails off, and as Green's hand finds its goal, a manic look comes to Mick's eyes. Muscles strain in his neck and shoulders, and his right fist rockets up to meet sharply with Green's neck. You wouldn't have expected such force from such a weenie little clone, but Green flies an easy 3 or 4 meters before connecting with the door behind him. Green somehow lands dazedly on his feet.

Mick bellows, "Citizen, pilfering is not in the interests of team morale. In fact it is highly detrimental to it." As he begins to stand, previously cauterized veins burst open and gouts of blood spray copiously from the shredded remains of Mick's neck.

Mick is now standing, and in his rage, he seems enormous. He turns to Christoph whose gun snaps back to ready.

...FIRE...BAD!

All sanity has left Mick's eyes, and he's definitely popping off buttons as veins bulge and blood sprays. He lurches toward Christoph bellowing, "Bread...good...Fire...Baaaaaad!"

Fonz-R-ELI-1 carves out a slick spin, hair gleaming and red jumpsuit rippling, as he draws his laser pistol and aims it at the traitorous Mick. "You must die, you must die, you must die commie scum, mutant poison, schlanky bum!" he shouts in a lurching cadence while firing.

"You- lousy- mutant- commie- pinko- bastard-," shouts Christoph, with a blast after each word.

With two thirds of his body now a raging inferno, Mick proceeds to tear Christoph's arm off (not his firing arm though, so Christoph continues to fire at point blank range). Screaming, "Fire...Bad! Fire...Bad!" Mick lurches toward Green to club him with Christoph's arm. His pace is definitely slowing.

Green blows a small puff of air into Mick face, and Mick suddenly falls over backward in a flaming heap. He twitches and appears to die, never releasing his grip on Christoph's dismembered limb.

As he continues to burn, all the lights in the hall dim. Sprinklers in the ceiling come on. In seconds, everyone is drenched.

THAT'S OVER--GOOD THING NO ONE GOT HURT

With the sprinklers still running at torrent level, Mick's flaming torso has been doused and is now steaming gently. His dead body twitches briefly, and I know it's rude to laugh at the dead, but for a moment, it almost looks as if he's trying to shove Christoph's severed arm up his own ass.

Christoph swoops in and pries his charred arm from Mick's cold, dead fingers. With a sheepish grin to the remainder of the group, he excuses himself to the bathroom.

AND THEN THERE WERE THREE

The sprinklers suddenly subside to a light mist, and the familiar, beloved voice of the Computer breaks the silence, "Greetings citizens. I heard laser fire, and now the sprinklers are running in your corridor. Is there some way I may be of assistance?"

AFTERMATH

Green shouts, "Attention, I am now wet!" He wipes some of the battle-muck from his uniform and snaps to attention.

Mick lays immobile on the ground. No matter what anyone says to him, he refuses to react. He will not respond to pain, humor or hate. He has stopped any visible signs of breathing and refuses even to show a pulse if checked. He twitches slightly every so often, and has willed his circulation system to force his blood to pool up towards the backside of his body.

"O big good Computer dude, all is well here. We have stopped the commie scourge, and are grateful the mutant showed his true nature, that we might correct it. Thanks be, thanks be to the computer for protecting us all!" says Fonz, as he rearranges a slightly displaced hair. "And say, how about another of those Fizz-Wizzes! I could use one right about now. Anyone else?"

The Computer hums softly--"Fizz-Wizz? That's interesting. Tell me Fonz-R-ELI-1, if the Computer is your best friend, who is your next best friend, and why?"

MUSKRAT LOVE

Fonz is apparently dumbfounded by the Computer's question and has yet to answer.

In the meantime, Green wanders over to Mick's body, sniffing experimentally at the rising steam. Without warning, he screams, "Muskrat on Mick!!" and body-dives onto Mick's dead, lifeless body.

Maury quickly follows suit, landing squarely on Green who is writhing on top of what used to be Mick.

King returns.

The Computer repeats, "Fonz-R-ELI-1, who is your next best friend after me?"

THY BROTHER'S KEEPER

And from around the corner look who's joined the party:

Mick-2 screams, "Now this is teamwork!" as he joins suit and belly flops onto his dead clone.

FONZ'S FIZZ

"Gee, Computer," says Fonz with a start, "that's an easy one! Of course, you're my second best friend, and my next best, and the fourth, and the fifth and sixth and seventh because the Computer is many things, the Computer is every good thing. Not only that, but we can have as much Fizz-Wizz as we want, and only a real friend would give us that." Fonz-R-ELI glances around plaintively and raps on the machine again. "Where is that Fizz-Wizz, anyway?"

The vending machine obediently drops a Fizz-Wizz for Fonz, although it is clearly labeled "Wakey-Sleepy Pharmacy Selection."

"Thank you, Citizen," says the Computer.

King: "Admirable response, Citizen. Bear in mind, though, that although the Fizz- Wizz limits were lifted, caution and conservation should always be our watchwords."

WHAT'S IN THE BAG?

Fonz-R-ELI-1 downs his Wakey-Sleepy Pharmacy Selection under the firm delusion that it contains his favorite drink. "I feel dizzy, I feel punny. I feel fizzy and funny and fine!" he exclaims. "Man, that's good stuff."

As Fonz sips his Fizz-Wizz, Green stops Muskrattng and reads the Wakey-Sleepy label on the side of the styrofoam cup. With an automatic maneuver, Green rolls himself out from under the Muskrat pile and scampers to the machine to get himself a cup of the same.

After his first gulp, Green visibly relaxes.

Not to be outdone by Fonz in devotion (or rhythm), Maury shouts, "You're my only friend too... the Computer is everything to me!!! I dance the great dance for the almighty great computer! Ho! Ha!" while doing the worst Hammer impression before or since the great cataclysm. In his own mind, Maury apparently thinks he's really pumpin' and jonesin', and when he's done he waits expectantly as if the applause that will be here any moment.

Mick-2 lifts himself up off of his still steaming clone and begins brushing black flecks of char off his pants. He says, "Oh wow, guys, that was just SUPER! I'm glad to see we're coping so well with the loss of loved ones."

Smiling broadly he turns to discuss something with King.

King smiles and nods. "Good point, Mick" He turns to face the entire group. He claps twice--"OK, people, listen up. In addition to his duties as Morale Officer, Mick-2 here will also be serving as the team's Official Grief Management Specialist/Associate. Losing a beloved team member is never easy, so if anyone just needs to talk, Mick-2 is always available."

King now squats down in the hall and begins rummaging through a large vinyl sack he brought back with him. Behind him, scrub-bots are mopping up the flood and sweeping what's left of Mick-1 into a large waste receptacle. Without looking up from the sack, King continues to speak:

"In the short time we've been together as a team, I've sensed quite a bit of tension. The recent violence in the hall only served to bear this out. Therefore, until we actually get to this Mark IV, I think what we need is a little team building exercise to help develop some trust and cooperation among all members."

As he says this last part, he's laying out new equipment for each of the other five group members. For Green, a gleaming black motorcycle helmet with the visor removed. For Christoph, a matching pair of wrap-around dark glasses. (Hey, where is Christoph, anyway? Last anyone knew he was carrying his severed arm off to the bathroom.) Mick-2, a pair of heavy black metal gauntlets that would reach almost to his elbows. For Fonz, a set of black thigh-high boots with platform soles. And for Maury, what looks like a black studded petbot collar.

For himself, King pulls out a 20-cm diameter flat black disk with grips on either side, and a dozen or so unlabelled buttons on top.

"Go ahead and put those on," King says, "and we'll get some practice in right away."

"Trust me--I've done this before, and everyone loves this."

EXCUSE ME, HAMM-R. DO YOU NEED A BEVERAGE TO GET IT STARTED?

Mick smiles at his fellow party members. Suddenly, he lights up as if remembering something. He whips out his pad and begins furiously writing.

Seeing Maury dancing has truly shocked Mick, though. Mick stops writing and accidentally rips and drops part of the page he was writing. Either not noticing or caring, he begins to shepherd the others away from Maury, yelling, "Everyone just stay back. You can't touch this! Just stay back."

"Fonz-R-ELI observes Maury's display with a look that, on any other day, might mean the stench of XR3 Burnt

Liver Foam had penetrated the cell. "You, sir, are no connoisseur!" he snaps. And, with a gentle pelvic sway, he purrs, "Try this on for size: Com-puuu-terr, every sight that I see is Com-pu-ter, nothing else is for me but Com-pu-ter, every truck I'll ever know, every gun I'll ever show is Com-puuu-terr!"

Maury looks unimpressed. With a flourish, he reaches into his fanny pack and pulls out a pair of red harem pants (as made famous by Hamm-R-TIM-3 in his video for "Let's Turn this Materna-Bot Out"). He pulls them on quickly, ready to show the group what he's made of.

YOU'VE GOT TO PRAY!

Maury repeats his Complex-renowned Hamm-R impression. It looks like a fit or a commotion, and apparently he has it down, because he appears to be in pain.

The grand finale comes when Maury's harem pants appear to untie themselves and fall to the floor.

PLEASING THE PUBLIC

When Maury finishes his routine, Mick picks up his pants for him and drapes them over his shoulders like a cape; reminiscent of the famous performer, James-B-RWN-4. With sheer awe on his face, Mick-2 feverishly produces his pad and pen and says to Maury, "Holy Lactation-Bot, Maury. That was just SWELL!" Mick-2 begins clapping and smiling. "Gosh, I haven't seen dancing like that since the late James-R-CRL-6 juked and jived through town. Would you do me a favor and sign my autograph book?" He pushes the pen into Maury's hand.

Green, however, has become very obviously nauseated (maybe he doesn't like Hamm-R, maybe his Fizz-Wizz didn't agree with him). Green covers his mouth with both hands and dashes around the corner to the bathroom.

There is a large thud, and sounds of retching.

King looks annoyed by the entire spectacle.

IT'S REGURGILICIOUS! (Green, Christoph)

Green barrels full speed around the corner to the little clone's room, and there stands Christoph in the middle of the corridor. Green slams full body into him, and as Green raises his hands to protect himself from the impact, he unwittingly releases the floodgates which were holding back a bad bottle of Fizz-Wizz and a double helping of Cold Fun.

Green sprawls to the floor, but Christoph maintains his balance and stands over Green with chunky strands of spew dripping from his still charred but newly reattached arm.

The Computer chimes in at this moment with, "Citizen Green-R-ROW-1, you appear to be suffering from gastro-intestinal distress. If you would like, I could have the nearest vend-bot issue you a cup of I-Can't-Believe- I'm-Not-Nauseous."

THE COMPUTER? QUICK, LOOK BUSY! (Fonz, King, Maury, Mick)

The retching is barely finished when you hear the voice of the Computer from around the corner:

"Citizen Green-R-ROW-1, you appear to be suffering from gastro-intestinal distress. If you would like, I could have the nearest vend-bot issue you a cup of I-Can't-Believe- I'm-Not-Nauseous."

PUKEFEST (Green, Christoph)

The noxious vapors from Green's bum Fizz-Wizz mingling with the scent of burnt flesh is too much for Christoph. He reels for a moment and then begins to retch. It doesn't take long for Green to realize where this is going and he tries to crawl away, but that damn Christoph is standing on his pants leg.

Poor Green has taken a load right in the face. The floor has become an awful mess. Christoph brushes himself off quickly and starts to walk back to the rest of the group as two scrub-bots are already working their way toward the puddle around Green.

PUKEFEST (Fonz, King, Maury, Mick)

More retching noises.

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

Maury is breathless and panting as he signs the adoring Mick's pad.

Fonz is debating whether to dignify Maury's shameless display with any further response.

King is starting to look seriously pissed, because no one wants to play with his toys.

It's at this moment that Green and Christoph rejoin the remainder of the group. Both are entirely drenched in vomit. Christoph's arm has been reattached but still looks

a little charred and withered. Neither one acts as if anything unusual has happened. A pair of scrubbots trails behind them, mopping up their drippings.

Much to King's delight, Christoph puts on his glasses, and waits patiently for new instructions. Green, in turn, puts on his helmet and says, "Potty break--Complete! Green-R-ROW-1-- ready for action!"

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

Mick stuffs the pad back into his uniform and gives Maury enthusiastic thanks as he turns his attention back to King. "My apologies, Noble Leader. I thought it would be good for the citizens to bond through an exchange of spasmodic dance steps." Mick's eyes grow huge as he spies the metal gloves. "Oh WOW! Big, metal gloves! Oh Gosh! Thanks, King. They're great." Mick puts them on and holds his hands out admiring them. "Metal... and... BIG! Heh. COOL! They're really metal. Great. Even though they restrict fine motor skills and serve to contain expanding skin, they offer great protection from the acid rinse when it's my turn to do dishes. THANKS KING!"

Fonz-R-ELI-1 eyes King warily. "There's the good, and then there's the ugly, sonny, and there's something just not right about those kinky devices of yours. Do you take us for Paul Anka groupies or something? I suppose you'd like to see me with a star on my eye, eating a toasted chik-soy pattie! Well, sirrah, I may be a dancer and I may be a lover, but I'm not a-gonna dance for you, no way and no how. It's all gaucherie... is no-one a professional anymore?"

WHAT YOU TALKING 'BOUT, WILLIS?

King stares wide-eyed at Fonz. After a moment's thought, he addresses the group as a whole: "I think it is interesting to note for the record that Fonz-R-ELI-1 just directly defied the order of an Orange level citizen," he indicates the orange braid on his shoulder, "and furthermore, if I translated correctly, he also directly insulted a loyal citizen of higher clearance. Refresh my memory, somebody-- do any of these actions constitute treason?"

Startled, Mick looks around the room wildly. He looks to King and worriedly asks, "Did you hear that?" Ignoring King, Mick then pulls out his pad and begins writing awkwardly. He grimaces and then stops writing long enough to fling the right gauntlet off of his hand, yelling at it as it falls. "Off off damned glove!" He then continues writing frantically.

And to add to the confusion, an unidentified and clearly unarmed Red-Clearance clone has just rounded the corner. She has the yellow stripes on her sleeve that identify her

as a registered mutant, and a PLC patch is on her coveralls. She approaches King, shows him a clipboard, and points to Fonz and Christoph.

King is nodding.

MEGADETH

Fonz-R-ELI-1 scratches his ear and gives King the once-over. He taps him on the shoulder to draw his attention from the chippie with the clipboard. "Bubbo, I'm aware that you're sociologically sick. But my motto is, 'hate the winner, love the sinner,' and you shouldn't be ashamed to be yourself. Just because I'm not wired to participate in that sort of lifestyle choice doesn't mean I don't fully support it. I'm all for it, as a matter of fact! So you just go ahead and express yourself, and I'll do what I can as long as things don't get too far out of hand." Fonz gives the Red-Clearance clone the twice-over and checks his hair for proper adhesiveness. "Now, see, that's more like what I'm talking about. I'll dance with her any time you want!"

Mick says to King, "I'm not one to jump to conclusions, but it sounds like treason to me. Away with the foul traitor!" King nods agreement, draws a revolver and casually shoots Fonz-R-ELI-1 dead before turning back to the clone with the clipboard. Absently, he speaks to Mick-2 without looking at him, "Make a note for me that Fonz-R-ELI-1 was shot for insubordination. It'll make debriefing go that much smoother."

Mick scribbles furiously with a broad, tight smile locked on his face. "Done, King, Sir. Can we go to materials requisition now?"

King replies, "Absolutely, but Sue here has a couple of things to go over first, and then we'll need to finish the instructions for the team-building exercise, and *then* we can head to PLC." He steps aside to allow "Sue" to come forward. "Well, Sue, your papers are all in order--Go ahead."

Sue tucks her clipboard under one arm, and she glances at Mick-2. A corona of blue flame rises from her and blasts across the corridor to engulf Mick-2. Mick writhes in agony (Boy--this looks familiar) and his pad, pen, and remaining gauntlet fall to the floor. As Mick-2 drops bonelessly to the ground, you swear you can see the ghostly outline of Mick-1 mouthing the words, "Fire...Bad...", standing over Mick-2's lifeless form. Then, as quickly as it started, the blue flame and the image of Mick-1 disappear.

The scrubbots had been working silently on the vomit around Green and Christoph this whole time, but gleefully now they turn their attention to the two fresh corpses.

Sue makes a checkmark on her clipboard. "Well, that commie traitor won't be having any more psychic contact with the dead." She turns to go. "If you have any more trouble, just let us know."

King turns to Green. "Green-R-ROW-1, collect Mick and Fonz's things to be turned over to their new clones. The pad, however, I would like you to keep for me until debriefing where we can turn it over to the authorities."

FINALLY--GAME ON!!

Mick-R-THY-3 has joined the team. Strangely, there's no sign of Fonz-2 yet.

King says something about being late, and the lot of you move to enter PLC (finally).

Before you make it, King is waylaid [will the interruptions never end?] by a very large red-clearance clone with huge tendons popping out on his neck, he's that wound up. He hands King a slip of paper and swings his considerable bulk around to face the group.

King peruses the slip of paper.

The hulking clone fixes the group with a chilling stare--made all the more unsettling by the unhinged glaze over his left eye.

He growls in a decibel range not meant for growling and screams, "I am Soarth-R-OAT-6! and I AM THE GOD OF HELLFIRE!!!!!" With that, both hands fly from him at light speed and plunge into the chests of Green and Christoph. Before anyone can react, Soarth rips out their still beating hearts and holds them up to their faces so they can see how black they are before they die. Fixing his gaze on Christoph, he says, "Regenerate that, you commie mutant prick."

Green and Christoph both crumple and are dead. Soarth scurries to a corner and with furtive glances over his shoulder begins to actually eat the raw flesh of the hearts.

Maury and Mick, in unison, turn stunned faces to King. King waves the slip of paper at them and says, "Well, apparently he has a license to do that."

Recovering quickly, Mick says, "Well I didn't follow those cryptic references to 'God' and 'Hellfire,' (whatever they are), but I certainly do like his style."

After some thirty minutes of nothing happening, King speaks vaguely to empty air, "Um...Computer. I wasn't sure if you were aware, but we are currently missing three members of our party. Will Fonz-R-ELI-2, Green-R-ROW-2 and Christoph-R-RBN-2 be joining us soon?"

The Computer: "I'm sorry, but due to [deleted for security reasons] replacement clones for troubleshooter missions will be unavailable until the team from [deleted for security reasons] is able to [deleted for security reasons]. But thank you for your request. Rest assured that your friend the Computer will provide you with everything you require for this mission. Have a nice day."

King is visibly shaken, and dejectedly, he packs up his nifty black devices. "Oh well. And I was so looking forward to this. But I'm sure we'll have plenty of time for team-building later."

And with that, King, Maury, and Mick enter PLC to pick up the mission equipment.

This is a typical PLC office: 3 uncomfortable chairs to wait in, and 23 people already waiting. Inadequate ventilation. Nothing to read but surplus tech manuals for equipment that was never issued and six-month old magazines reviewing the latest episode of the NYPSector Blue vidshow. The business end of the room (opposite the door) consists of a single counter running the 6 meter width of the room and two very bored looking orange-level clerks who are busy not helping the 23 people in the waiting area. Behind the clerks are shelves and stacks and boxes and sacks of every conceivable sundry a loyal clone might need. Heck, you would almost swear that's a tacnuke cannon peeking around the corner. If anyone were looking at Mick-3, they would notice his eyes sparkling at the possibilities, and if Maury were the drooling type, you would notice him drooling right now. King, of course, seems more concerned that the racks of request forms aren't color-coded and arranged alphabetically for more efficient access.

Chapter 3—Getting into PLC

WHO'S THAT CASTING DEVIOUS STARES...
[Christoph, Green, Fonz]

Green-2 & Christoph-2 & Fonz-2 are all brought together and introduced.

Pete-B-LAV-6 greets them and says, "I have the greatest faith in all of you and am sure the mission will be a great success with all of you on board." He holds up a picture of Mick-R-THY-3. "Unfortunately, there is a most heinous traitor in our midst. Mick-R-THY-3 conspired with the admitted traitor, Soarth-R-OAT-5, and your own detainment is a direct result of their actions. I offer you my apologies and a chance to rectify this personally." He hands each of you an authenticated termination voucher authorizing any of you to kill Mick-R-THY-3. "As an added incentive, there is a 250 credit bonus and a week's exemption from food ration limits for the clone who delivers the killing blow. "Good luck, citizens."

And you're off to PLC. I assume this is a race?

AND THEY'RE OFF! [Christoph; Fonz; Green]

Well--apparently, a race it is.

Christoph and Fonz are both much taller than Green and are leading initially just based on length of stride. Christoph and Fonz both have lasers drawn, and Green is readying his anti-personnel projectile thing.

Within seconds, Christoph is panting and huffing like both his lungs just dropped out his ass, and as he begins to fall back, he swings his truncheon at Fonz's legs in an attempt to trip him up. He misses, but Fonz stumbles some as he jumps out of the way. Green zips in between the two and easily takes front.

Green is easily 5 meters ahead as he rounds the corner and comes in sight of PLC room 2335.

AND THEY'RE STILL OFF! [Christoph; Fonz; Green]

The whole way, Green is yelling, "Yahoo! Kill the witch! Kill the witch!"

ROLLEE, ROLLEE, ROLLEE! [King; Maury; Mick]

The lights have gone out in PLC. You would think this is just your usual blackout (when isn't there a blackout?) except for the distinctive sound of laser fire right before hand.

Apparently, the other 23 people in the room heard that too, and panic ensues in the dark. You can rest assured that the PLC clerks are already cowering behind the counter (I know you were worried about them). Elsewhere, sweaty screaming clones are bouncing off one another in their scramble to escape commie terrorists.

Over cries of "Where's the door?" and "We're all gonna die!" King can clearly be heard saying, "OK people, remember your Accidental-Laser-Fire drill from school: Stop; Drop; and Roll, Dick-Y, Roll." King must have followed his own advice, because his voice now comes from the floor. "Most importantly, remain calm."

DON'T FIRE UNTIL YOU SEE THE... OH NEVERMIND [King; Maury; Mick]

Random bursts of red and orange laser fire now punctuate the darkness.

LAST ONE IN'S A... OH SHIT! [Green]

You are about 3 meters from the door when you recognize the sounds of a full on riot coming from inside PLC.

You pause.

You have about a second and a half before Fonz or Christoph rounds that corner behind you.

BREAD GOOD? [Maury; (ccMick)]

From the darkness beside you, you hear a softly whispered "Bread Good." followed by a wet ripping sound coming from your own neck--almost as if your head was being ripped from your body.

And, in fact, that is what happened.

You are dead. Await further instruction.

FORGIVE ME, FATHER, FOR I WILL SIN [Green]

Something is definitely wrong here. That's laser fire coming from inside, and lot's of it.

Acting on a hunch, you duck into a Computer Confessional across the hall. With anti-personnel launcher still at ready, you peer out through the grate window in the door and watch as Fonz runs up and grabs the doorknob to PLC.

LAST ONE IN IS A... OH SHIT! [Fonz]

You've far outpaced Christoph, and he is completely out of sight as you round the corner and bolt to door 2335.

As you grab the knob, you hear the sounds of a full out rumble on the other side, complete with laser-fire, loud thuds, and multiple screams of anger, fear and pain. Green must have gotten more than he bargained for.

Your hand is on the knob, and you guess you have about 2 seconds before Christoph rounds that corner behind you.

DAMN THAT HURTS. [Christoph]

Green and Fonz have both disappeared around the corner, but you know you're close. If it weren't for the damn stitch in your side, you could almost manage a fast walk. Your lungs are getting that wheezy, whistly quality that only a couple of Marl-B-OROs will fix.

Very faintly, you hear thumps and screams from up ahead. With any luck, Mick-3 is pulling the same testosterone trick Mick-1 had, and the other two will have him worn down by the time you get there.

WHY DON'T YOU GO WHERE FASHION SITS... [Maury; Mick]

Mick lovingly strokes Maury's torso while he waits for the first person to walk through the door. He coos to the lifeless form, "Bread good. Bread. Good."

THAT'S MR. ABOMINABLE TO YOU [Maury; Mick]

Quietly in the dark Mick continues hugging the corpse.

"And I will hug you and squeeze you. And I will call you George." He asks the torso, "Would you like to be called George, George?"

And now (finally) someone is turning the knob.

Mick brushes off the plate and taps the dirt from his shoes with Maury's torso. A couple of practice swings, and...

TRYIN' HARD TO LOOK LIKE GAR-Y-CPR...

Christoph is just rounding the corner and comes in sight of Fonz who is grabbing the knob to room 2335.

Fonz plugs two shots through the door for good measure and flings it open with guns a-blazing.

Strangely, the lights in PLC are all out, and the 23 troubleshooters waiting inside are milling about in a panic-- many of them with THEIR guns a-blazing. And

when the light from the doorway hits their fevered eyes, they turn as one and, in unison, let loose a barrage of red and orange laser light at the only visible target.

Poor Fonz.

Simultaneously, a headless torso is swung by an unseen assailant from behind the door with a mad cry of "Zuuuper-Doooooerrrr!" The unidentified torso (wearing a beautiful pair of harem pants, I might add) connects with Fonz square across the head and shoulders. Fonz flies unceremoniously across the hall and slams into a confessional door, which crumples inward.

Christoph is still limping painfully toward the door-- obviously out of breath, and he is pulling a grenade from inside his jacket.

Within the room, the troubleshooters who have yet to be downed by friendly fire have turned their collective attention to what is now the largest visible target in the sector. Using the poor visibility to his advantage, Mick charges into their midst with Maury as a shield. Once fully in the fray, Mick again does his Babe-R-UTH-1 impression, bowling over reds and oranges with mad swings of his Mauryville Slugger, bellowing, "Puttin' on de Riiiiittzz!"

With Mick's attention elsewhere, Green leaps from the shattered confessional and over Fonz's somewhat spongy remains. From within the confessional, the Computer can be heard: "I hear tension in your breathing, citizen. Do you need to talk? Or maybe a pharmaceutical?"

Green dashes through the open door to PLC and out of the corner of his eye, he notes Christoph still trudging along, and behind Christoph, a familiar figure strolling up casually and whistling to himself.

King is still lying on the floor in PLC shouting orders. "Citizens, calm down! Remember your training. Think first; fire only as a last resort." The nine or ten troubleshooters still standing totally ignore him as they open fire again. Half at Mick, and half at the new threat of Green bounding through the door. (Rule #7: Always, always, ALWAYS, fear that which you do not understand.)

Green drops two of them in an instant with his anti-personnel projectile launcher--the smooth red shafts of his projectiles protruding from their throats as they fall--and he searches for a clean shot on the now gigantic and roaring Mick-3. Unfortunately, he can only make guesses in the half-light at the back of the room as Maury's now bloody and broken torso wipes out a few more valiant warriors.

Christoph is nearly to the doorway. Still holding a cramp in his gut with one hand, he uses the other hand to bring

the grenade to his mouth. Scanning the darkness within PLC for his target, he absently pulls the pin with his teeth and spits it to the side. The pin bounces off Fonz's upturned lifeless face. The effort brings on a coughing and wheezing fit, and Christoph doubles over.

Spotting Green, Mick moves poderously into the light, dragging Maury behind him and casually swatting aside two more troubleshooters.

Mick is wearing infrared goggles.

Mick slams shut the door to PLC. There is a soft click. Too late, Christoph recovers from his coughing fit only to discover himself trapped on the wrong side of the door with Fonz's corpse.

Green assumes a defensive crouch and lets loose a volley of three anti-personnel projectiles just before the darkness becomes absolute. All three find their mark with a satisfying THWAACK, THWAACK, THWAACK!

From the darkness comes a half-giggle, half-whisper:

"Bread."

"Good."

WE GOT STINKIN' BADGES [Christoph; Mick]

Christoph stares at the locked door, and then at the pinless grenade in his hand. "Great, now what."

Being very careful not to release the trigger, Christoph begins looking around for a garbage chute, while fumbling in his pocket for a cigarette.

He spots the nearest garbage chute just a few feet away and strolls over to it, lighting his smoke with his free hand.

Approaching from one end of the corridor, still whistling to himself, is Mick-4. "Hi, they told me to meet the Mark IV mission here. You must be Christoph." He offers a hand to shake.

From the other end of the corridor comes a squad of Green-level IntSec Enforcers in full SWAT armor with laser rifles out and ready. Their commander levels his rifle at Christoph. "FREEZE! Drop your weapon and no one gets hurt!"

WELL, THIS IS AWKWARD [Green; Mick]

Mick grabs Green and hugs him close to his body, careful not to hurt him. Mick exclaims, "George!" then lovingly begins whispering to Green, "And I will hug you and pat

you. And squeeze you and love you, and I will call you George." Mick begins stroking Green's hair and patting him on the back. Mick is becoming noticeably smaller now. And as some intelligence returns to his head, he has the decency to look uncomfortable with Green in his arms.

Too close to make effective use of his Anti-Personnel Mini-Strike Projectile Launcher, Green takes advantage of Mick's pause to pluck one of the projectiles from Mick's thigh and begin stabbing him repeatedly with it on whatever body parts present themselves, while screaming something that sounds like, "DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE..." etc.

King has found the switch to the emergency lights. King and Green are apparently the only live people in the room (not counting the Orange-level clerks still cowering on the other side of the counter.)

King says, "Well, looks like we're next."

THAT'S A GOOD CLONE [Christoph; Mick]

Mick-4 throws his hands up and says to Christoph, "Oh Gosh, citizen, let's not make waves here, they're just doing their jobs."

SOMEONE'S IN TROUBLE [Fonz]

Your getting close to PLC, and from around the corner, you hear a very tough sounding voice yell, "FREEZE! Drop your weapon and no one will get hurt."

Another voice replies, "Oh Gosh, citizen, let's not make waves here, they're just doing their jobs." From the briefing tape you saw, you'd guess that's Mick.

You are still out of sight around the corner.

CAN I HELP YOU, OFFICER? [Christoph; Mick]

Christoph replies, "Happy to comply, citizen." and smiles as he drops the grenade and puts his hands up. And without a backward glance, he immediately dives headfirst into the open garbage chute. (Funny that they'd make those things big enough for a human body.)

The Green-level squad leader screams, "Holy Motherboard--it's active!!" and the whole squad begins a mad backpeddle down the corridor.

[So Mick, what's the fuse on one of these? Five seconds?]

HOLY MOTHERBOARD [Fonz]

Fonz hears Christoph say, "Happy to comply, citizen." Then some scuffling. Then the unfamiliar voice screams, "Holy Motherboard-- it's active!!" Followed by the sounds of panicked fleeing. (Not in Fonz's direction.)

HOLY MOTHERBOARD [Green]

Green is now busy tearing Mick-3's throat out and bathing in the spray of blood, when from the hall is heard: "Holy Motherboard--it's active!!" Followed by the sounds of the panicked fleeing of many clones.

King is running to dive behind the counter.

BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES (Green)

Green yells at King, "Pull yourself together! Help with the barricade! You guys over there," to the craven cowards cowering behind the counter as he piles bodies against the door, "either help out here or you can add to the pile!"

Green kicks Mick-3 swiftly in the crotch as he hauls two more bodies onto the pile.

LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY (Fonz)

Fonz flees madly from the sound of the commotion.

DON'T PANIC (Christoph, Mick)

Smirking, yet with great skill and quickness, Mick picks up the grenade and throws it down the garbage shoot, careful to close the lid. Whistling a happy toon, he turns and knocks on the door to PLC. He waits patiently for it to unlock, calling to the security guards,

"It's okay, Boys. I disposed of it properly. Please make a note of my fearless dedication to the computer."

Mick quickly whips out his pad and begins writing.

The green squad does not return.

WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE (Green)

There is a knock at the door, and through the pile of muffled bodies, you hear Mick (4, you presume), "It's okay, Boys. I disposed of it properly. Please make a note of my fearless dedication to the computer."

WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE (Fonz)

Fonz pauses in his mad flight when he runs into Maury-2.

Together, they stumble over introductions, and they can hear Mick-4 in the distance yelling, "It's okay, Boys. I disposed of it properly. Please make a note of my fearless dedication to the computer."

SIX O'CLOCK, TV HOUR...

From deep within the bowels of Alpha Complex comes an ominous rumbling. It starts low, like a growl and builds until the walls are visibly vibrating.

And then it's over.

GREEN NAME; RED CLEARANCE; BROWN NOSE (Green)

King pushes a few bodies aside to get the door unlocked.

Green is retrieving his anti-personnel mini-strike projectiles from the various bodies around the room and cleaning his anti-personnel mini-strike projectile launcher. He makes small talk with King as he does so: "Thank the computer I was able to save, single-handedly and with much danger to myself, these poor helpless souls cowering behind the counter from whatever evil devices Mick-3 was conjuring up. Oh, King, are you well and safe? Happy day, I was able to do the computer's will, oh the computer is so great to allow me this opportunity ..." He continues in this vein for some time.

King gets the door open.

The Orange-clearance clerks haven't stirred from behind the counter yet.

FALSE ALARM (Fonz)

Fonz-3 and Maury-2 have now met. Fonz admires Maury's impeccably tailored and stylishly oversized suit with matching wide brimmed hat.

Deciding that the immediate danger is over, they head to PLC.

THAT'S RIGHT, I NO LONGER HAVE ANY SKIN ON MY TEETH (Christoph)

Christoph is hanging by one hand on the inside of garbage chute. A mean and foul smelling updraft surrounds and rushes past him creating a continuous whistle in his ears.

With extreme effort and laser ready, Christoph hauls himself halfway through the hatch back into the hall

outside PLC. Mick-4 is knocking at the door to 2335 with his back to Christoph.

Before Mick can turn around, Christoph pops off two laser rounds at him. Both go wide due to Christoph's poor angle and leave scorch marks on the door and ceiling.

Now the door to 2335 is opened by someone on the inside.

FOR THE LOVE OF COMPUTER--WILL IT EVER STOP? (Mick)

Mick is still knocking at PLC, and a try of the handle reveals that it is still locked. But there is commotion on the other side as if someone is coming.

Without warning, two black hot scorch marks appear on the door by his face and the ceiling just above him--apparently made by red laser fire from his left down the hall.

DON'T MIND THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN (Christoph, Fonz, Mick)

Maury-2 and Fonz-3 have finally arrived. Maury is wearing an amazingly well tailored, broad-shoulders and stylishly oversized red suit with matching wide-brimmed hat.

As they round the corner, they see Mick-4 standing at the door to 2335, which has apparently just been opened by King-1 on the other side. The entire section of corridor is battle-scarred, with Fonz-2's body still laying in the open, and some of the laser scorches on the walls (especially right around Mick) are fresh enough to still be smoking.

Between Mick and the new arrivals is Christoph. Christoph is trying to climb out of a garbage chute. He is halfway out, and is struggling to get his legs over the edge. His progress is slow because he is still holding his laser in one hand.

LOOK WHO'S COME TO SUPPER (Green)

King gets the door open.

Mick-4 is on the other side. He is staring incredulously at something off to his left down the corridor.

[INSERT WITTY TITLE] (Christoph, Fonz, Green)

Mick turns quickly and enters PLC.

At the same time, Green leans his head out to see who's coming.

Fonz and Maury stroll past Christoph to go inside, and Fonz comments to Christoph: "Easy does it! Turn off the juice, loose, and you'll get out of that chute!"

Christoph would snarl at him, but he's too busy struggling frantically to get out of that chute as quickly as possible.

As they enter PLC, Fonz says to Maury, "Golly Moses, that's a slick suit you've got on. Does it double as armor, or do you just wear it underneath?"

NO MERCY FOR SWINE (Green, Mick)

As Mick strolls into PLC past King, he waits until he is safely inside to tell King, "Sir, with all due respect to you, Christoph has severely endangered this team's morale by trying to kill both myself and a slurry of Green level security officers. The Computer should have confirmation of these events. My recommendation as Morale Officer is immediate execution. I'd be pleased as punch, sir if you would do the honors."

CLIFFHANGER ENDING

Fonz and Maury enter PLC.

With a knowing look and a nod toward the hall, Mick walks past King saying, "I'll go save your spot in line at the PLC desk, sir." Mick proceeds to the front desk of PLC to be waited on.

Mick is writing something in his pad.

CHAPTER IV--PLC GRUDGEMATCH IN A STEEL CAGE

WE'RE ALL IN PLC!!!!

Christoph has apparently freed himself from the garbage chute.

Christoph barrels into PLC yelling, "Mick is a traitor! Stop him! He tried to murder me with some type of bomb when I fled into the garbage chute!"

Christoph fires as he first rounds the corner and his shot goes wild.

He continues, "Traitor! Commie scum! Ask the guards--they saw him do it!"

Fires again. Mick is hit in the thigh and wounded.

OH, THE HUMANITY!

Mick grasps his leg and doubles over in pain. With the high-pitched squeal of a young school-clone, he begins weeping uncontrollably. Apparently unable to use his legs, he drags himself towards King. Christoph lets loose another shot which sears the tile by Mick's chest.

Green sneers at Christoph's poor marksmanship.

Mick yells to King, "You're not going to protect me? He's a dirty mutant! Are you going to believe a dirty, nasty, lying mutant freak over me? Look at him! He should be executed for his hygiene alone." Mick gives a quick glance at Maury and then returns his pleading to King.

The speech is all a distraction. Mick ferrets out an experimental-issue weapon with jazzy looking fins on the barrel. He begins to empty it in Christoph's direction. "Don't make me angry you genetic atrocity! You wouldn't like me when I'm angry!"

Three beams of unidentified energy sizzle from Mick's experimental rifle, but all three fail to find their mark.

MR. GENETICALLY SUPERIOR

With a loud "Dohh!" Mick bangs his weapon once on the floor to improve its aim. He shoots at Christoph again. A direct hit in the chest which heals instantly, leaving a charred hole in Christoph's coveralls. Christoph returns fire, but his shot goes low as he tries to avoid hitting King (who is standing directly over Mick).

Mick is undaunted: "How do you like that you little mutant gene-licker? Huh? You want some more, you

double-helix wanna-be?" Shoot. Shoot. Shoot again. The last shot glances across Christoph's hip and again heals immediately. Click, click, click. Mick's fancy weapon is dead.

Mick wets himself.

ENOUGH!

King hollers, "CEASE FIRE!" at the top of his lungs. Then shakes his head sadly as both pause for a moment to stare at him.

MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A CAT-BOT

Mick drops his spent weapon and waits expectantly for further instruction from King.

Green sneers at Mick: "What a pet."

Christoph sees an opportunity and loses three more rounds at Mick. He yells to King, "Don't believe him, sir. He is an admitted Communist who tried to destroy Alpha Complex." All three shots miss Mick entirely and also just narrowly miss King at the same time. Christoph holsters his pistol and draws his truncheon as he rapidly closes the distance between himself and Mick. "Traitorous Commie dupe! I'll teach you to attack my Complex!"

Christoph clubs Mick soundly, drawing blood from Mick's temple and stunning him momentarily.

GIRLY-MAN

With a screech that makes fingernails on a chalkboard flinch with pain, Mick throws himself over the desk in PLC, and slides on his soiled pants behind the cowering Orange level clerks.

Christoph gets one more swing in before before Mick is out of range, but misses.

Mick can be heard burrowing among the paperwork behind the counter.

Christoph pauses to catch his breath and pulls his laser pistol out again, adding a fresh barrel, as he moves to follow the cowardly Mick.

Fonz draws his own laser pistol and asks King, "Would you like me to put a stop to this for you?"

King nods.

Green is still busy obsessively polishing his oversized projectile.

Christoph leans over the counter, searching for his target.

[NONE] (Maury, Green, Fonz, Christoph)

Fonz shouts, "Christoph-R-RBN-2, you are in violation of direct orders." He shoot. The laser only clicks. The barrel reads full, so the gun must have malfunctioned--jammed or something. Fonz stares quizzically at the weapon.

King snorts his derision at Fonz's ineptitude and draws his revolver.

Christoph, realizing his predicament, tries to scramble over the counter, still searching for Mick.

Suddenly, King, Fonz, and Green all have their Com Units come on, and everyone hears Mick: "King, Fonz, Green. This is Mick-R-THY-4. I have an emergency situation. Do you read? Over."

Then, all three Com Units begin whining with feedback.

HERE I AM (Mick)

Mick pulls out his Com Unit and says: "King, Fonz, Green. This is Mick-R-THY-4. I have an emergency situation. Do you read? Over."

Mick clearly hears his own voice blasted from three other Com Units within PLC, and then the unmistakable whine of feedback.

It gets loud enough that even Mick's own unit is starting to hum and whistle.

THERE HE IS (Christoph)

Christoph is halfway over the counter when Mick's voice starts on the Com Units.

When the feedback starts, Christoph can hear a unit behind the counter start to hum and whistle. ...Mick.

As soon as he can get over the damn counter, Christoph's gonna blast the crap out of Mick and that heap of Vent-Tiller instruction manuals he's hiding under.

SORTING THE CLONES FROM THE BOYS (Green, Maury, Christoph, Fonz)

The hum and whine of feedback switches off suddenly.

Taking aim at a trembling heap of instruction manuals, Christoph pops off two shots with his fresh barrel. Both

shots miss their mark, but strike one of the orange-level clerks who apparently thought he was safe here behind the counter. The clerk begins to cry and clutch his abdomen. Christoph yells, "I found the traitor."

Fonz leaps at Christoph, swinging with his truncheon. Unfortunately, his reach is just inches short as Christoph ducks to the side. Fonz says in the midst of his attempt to bludgeon the offender, "We must achieve cessation of this nonsense! You there, punk, remember that a boy who kills has no heart!"

Fonz's speech is cut short by a bullet whizzing by his nose. It came from King and seems to have been meant for Christoph, because that's who it hits. The wound is entirely superficial though, and Christoph is merely stunned for a moment.

King yells, "I said, 'CEASE FIRE!'" Another shot ricochets off the counter.

With a tremendous display of agility, Green does a handspring and then flip onto the counter while holding his anti-personnel mini-strike projectile launcher. He boldly announces, "This is my counter! There are many like it but this one is mine!" He then launches anti-personnel mini-strike projectiles at all five of his team members.

King is barely scratched--he changes his aim.

Maury takes his projectile in the throat. Poor Maury. He dies with a gurgle.

The shots at Fonz and Christoph, who are closest to him, surprisingly fail to find their marks.

The projectile intended for Mick sinks harmlessly into the side of the pile of instruction manuals.

The unwounded PLC clerk screams like a little girl and crawls behind a stack of boxes.

The front door opens, and a team of eight red-level troubleshooters troops in (careful to avoid the stack of bodies around the door.) They seem surprised to have walked into a gunfight.

NOISES (Mick)

The hum and whine of feedback switches off suddenly.

Two laser shots whiz by your position. One of the orange clerks begins crying. Christoph yells, "I found the traitor."

Fonz yells, "We must achieve cessation of this nonsense! You there, punk, remember that a boy who kills has no heart!"

Fonz's speech is cut short by a gunshot. King yells, "I said, 'CEASE FIRE!'" Another shot.

Green announces from above you, "This is my counter! There are many like it but this one is mine!" Then the sound of five quick shots (probably Green's anti-personnel mini-strike projectile launcher).

There is a strangled gurgle and a thud, and one projectile lodges in the stack of manuals you are hiding under.

The unwounded PLC clerk screams like a little girl.

The front door opens; more people have entered.

YOU WILL RESPECT MAH AUTHORITAH! (Green, Fonz, Christoph, Maury)

Title: You WILL respect mah authoritah! Or: When I say woah...

Mick has still not come out of hiding.

Christoph fires another half a barrel at Mick's supposed position. No response from Mick, but some instruction manuals are burning slowly.

Fonz continues in his attempt to club Christoph into submission. He clonks him a good one behind the ear, but then only grazes him as Christoph falls to one knee.

King is screaming at Green and Christoph: "The Computer blast all of you! When I say cease fire, by Silicon, you CEASE FIRE!" This is accompanied by two shots of his revolver at Green. Dark red blood wells slowly from Green's shoulder.

Green spins and fires seemingly at random, taking down an Orange clerk and one of the Red troubleshooters in the door. One of Green's projectiles pins King's left foot to the floor. Green is singing a little song to himself as three or four of the Reds in the door open fire on him. Several shots catch Green in mid-caper, and he falls over the back of the counter giggling to himself.

Christoph can no longer ignore the pounding Fonz is giving him. He turns laboriously in Fonz's direction, bringing his laser to bear as his breath is coming in ragged gasps, blood running copiously from the back of his head.

Fonz soundly clonks Christoph again, and Christoph collapses, strange fleshy growths springing rapidly from most of his exposed skin and swirling around him to engulf him like a big squishy pink cocoon. Christoph seems motionless, but red veins throb ominously across the surface of his cocoon.

Fonz recoils--this is pretty gross.

King is unfastening his foot from the floor.

Several troubleshooters are rushing for the counter, presumably to ensure Green is dead.

MORE NOISES (Mick)

Title: You WILL respect mah authoritah! Or: When I say woah...

Mick has still not come out of hiding.

Christoph yells and several more laser shots are fired. Some instruction manuals are burning slowly near Mick.

There are sounds of a scuffle from Christoph's direction. Someone is getting clubbed pretty good.

King is screaming at Green and Christoph: "The Computer blast all of you! When I say cease fire, by Silicon, you CEASE FIRE!" This is accompanied by two shots of his revolver.

Green is giggling and firing. At least two people are hit--one behind the counter and one by the door. Green is singing a little song to himself. Multiple lasers are being discharged. Green is still giggling and falls. He lands right near Mick's position. Mick can see him by peering out between manuals. Green is bleeding profusely from the shoulder and has taken several laser hits.

Very moist noises are coming from Christoph's direction, and Fonz can be heard recoiling in obvious horror.

Several persons are rushing for the counter.

GREEN'S LITTLE SONG

[OCC: Green is very rightfully upset that the full text of his song did not appear in the last game post. My fault--I was merely being lazy in my hurry to leave town. So, for the purists in the audience, here in it's first public release is the full text of Green-R-ROW's Loyalty Hootenanny Jamborie:

I dance a silly dance and sing a silly song as I fire:

"Oh, I am a red-level troubleSHOOTer" twang "I do my job and I love the com-PUTer" thwang "Nobody would say that I'm a disPUTer" twang "but Mick-R-THY takes it up the POOPer" boing "OOooh red level red level we're the best" smack "Almost as good as the level that's next" zing "But you'd all look better laid to rest" beeow "With arrows protruding from your fucking intestinal tracts" twang "Sorry, chests"

Immediately following is where he was shot and lased and fell from the counter.

My apologies if I offended anyone's artistic sensibilities.]

IS IT STUFFY IN HERE, OR IS IT JUST ME?
(Christoph)

You are completely engulfed by some spongy mass. You cannot seem to move yet, and it's getting hard to breathe.

WAITING (Green, Mick, Fonz)

Mick pops up from the pile of instruction manuals runs screaming with his arms over his head away from Green. (Toward the back of PLC.)

Green seems not to notice or care. He pulls a small hand-rolled cigarette from his pouch and lights it with his hottorch. At the same time, he drops his anti-personnel mini-strike projectile launcher and draws a blaster. He is sitting expectantly with his back to the counter.

Fonz is still standing in stunned silence.

The unwashed hordes, thrilled at blowing Green from the counter, have nearly reached their downed quarry.

The pink mass that was Christoph is now twitching and tossing slightly.

NO--I DEFINITELY THINK IT'S GETTING STUFFY IN HERE (Christoph)

Christoph squirms inside his prison trying to reach his knife. He'll find out once and for all what this blasted thing is.

He gets his hand on it.

AGAIN? (Fonz, Green, Mick)

Mick has scurried to a far corner of PLC, where he squats down and watches Green warily while casting obvious glances at his own crotch and legs.

Fonz yells, "Don't worry, sonny, I'll free you from this monstrosity!" and begins hacking and battering away at Christoph's cocoon with his truncheon and a small knife he's drawn from his jacket.

Green shouts, "Oh crap! Does anyone know how to get the pin back in one of these things?"

The over-zealous zealots on the other side of the counter scream and run their little red fannies back to the door.

CHRISTOPH (Fonz, Mick, Green)

Christoph's cocoon swells up--rapidly doubling in size, then suddenly stops moving, growing, and pulsing.

BETTER CHECK AGAIN (Green, Mick)

Battered and bloodied, Green takes another drag on his smoke and very carefully levels his blaster at Mick's crotch.

Fonz is somewhere behind the bloated pink pile of what used to be Christoph, so Mick is the only one who can see what Green is doing.

LONG LIVE THE KING! (Green, Mick)

King leaps onto the counter above Green, while Mick shrieks and dives behind an industrial linen press. In the half second it takes King to locate his target and squeeze off a round, Green brings his blaster to vertical and gives King a blast right up the pooper.

Green has the satisfaction of watching King's charred body fall agonizingly to the floor just before the bullet lodged in Green's neck closes his eyes forever.

LONG LIVE THE KING! (Fonz)

From where Fonz is standing, Green and Mick are no longer visible behind the bulk of Christoph's remains.

King leaps onto the counter and is searching for a target.

Mick is heard screaming in terror again.

King fires his pistol at something below the counter just as a blast of energy explodes up into his crotch.

The King is dead.

Chapter V--Teambuilding

WE'RE NEXT

Seeing that the immediate danger has passed, Mick emerges from hiding and climbs over to the correct side of the counter, and rings the bell for service. He glances around briefly, and when no help immediately arrives, he begins filling out a TSM-15-12-RRR (Troubleshooter Priority Mission Equipment Requisition--New Revised--Form).

Fonz realizes his efforts are too little too late to save the doomed Christoph. Fonz mourns the loss of his fallen comrade, tears of frustration and sadness welling up in his eyes.

Fonz can also now see that Green is also dead.

The Computer now speaks: "Troubleshooters, I heard sounds of turmoil. Do you require assistance or maybe replacement clones?"

Fonz replies, "All quiet here, boss. But we seem to have lost a few fellows here."

Mick adds: "Yes. Fortunately, we stopped the actions of the traitorous Christoph-R-RBN-2, but in the skirmish we sadly have lost Green-R-ROW-2, Maury-R-TEE-2, and our fearless and dashing team leader, King-R-THR-1. Also, it seems that the clerks in PLC 2335 were caught in the crossfire."

The Computer: "Thank you citizen, Mick-R-THY-4. I will expect a full report from you and your surviving teammate. Replacement clones are forthcoming, and Fonz-R-ELI-3 shall be acting team leader until King-2 arrives."

IT'S ALIVE--ALIVE!

Maury-R-TEE-3 Green-R-ROW-3 Christoph-R-RBN-3
King-R-THR-2

You have all been mobilized.

You are told by Pete-B-LAV-6 that you must get to PLC in room 2335 to collect your equipment.

You are to join Fonz-R-ELI-3 and Mick-R-THY-4. Your mission will be to guard the new experimental Mark IV weapon until it's field test.

You have no other knowledge of the mission so far.

Go.

NO, YOU'RE THE MAN!

Mick looks expectantly to the skies as the computer speaks. His eyes are rolling back in his head as if in rapture. When the computer finishes talking, Mick replies, "The report will be ready shortly, Oh Great Silicon One." He waits a bit, shoots a strangely disturbing glance at Fonz, and says, "Well, you must be sooooo happy to be team leader now! While I'm waiting for the clerk to take my order, maybe you could tell me what we're going to do now? You're the boss. What you say goes. Big Man on Complex. Any ideas up there in that organic bowl?"

EQUIPMENT TIME

Mick-R-THY-4 and Fonz-R-ELI-3 are waiting expectantly at the counter in PLC.

Christoph-R-RBN-3, King-R-THR-2, Maury-R-TEE-3, and Green-R-ROW-3 enter along with Dram-O-MIN-4.

Dram-O quickly hops behind the counter. "I'm sorry. PLC is now open for business." He pulls a lever, and a bright red "73" lights up over his head. Dram looks around expectantly. "Now serving number 73." He looks quizzically behind you. "Number 73?"

Your team is the only one here.

IT'S A HUMMER

King is gathering the possessions of King-1

Mick scribbles something in his pad and tears the page out. Christoph muscles in front of him, snatching the torn page from Mick's hands. He glances at it and hands it to Dram-O and says, "We're number 73."

Dram-O drops his eyes for a moment. "Do you have a mission number?"

King-2 steps up. "Mission number 56456412AS98Q."

[OCC: like any of you fuckers were gonna pull that back out of chapter I.]

Dram-O consults his chart. "Oh, here it is. My predecessor has indicated that the priority status of your mission has been bumped up to Alpha-Green status. Your R&D complement has already been shipped over, and your package is ready in our QRT-PLC conference room through here. Humm-V-LAV-5 has scheduled 18:15 hours for your equipment briefing--you can go right in here."

He opens a side door behind the counter to allow you all through. A glance at the clock reveals that it is already 18:35.

In the conference room, the gaunt but dapperly- dressed figure of Humm-V-LAV-5 stands before a burnt-out pit. In the shallow, scorched depression is a very large crate marked "DANGER: MISSION EQUIPMENT". Flanking Humm-V are two Green- level Vulture Squadron goons armed with neurowhips and hand flamers, one of whom motions your team to sit on an empty bench. Humm-V is apparently already addressing the empty bench. The other guard is completely unaware of your team. In fact, he seems to be completely oblivious to everything except the pink wad of synth-gum on the ceiling which he is idly and repeatedly toasting with his hand flamer.

Humm-V is in the middle of a sentence as you all enter: "...just make sure you are beyond the blast radius if this should occur."

Humm takes a few seconds to flip through his notes to find the correct page. Maury-3 takes advantage of the pause to try and get an explanation of that last sentence [you may have missed something pretty important there]. "Um, Mr. Humm...when you say blast radius..." He is, unfortunately, cut short by the flick of a neurowhip from the conscious guard. "No questions--briefing."

Humm-V continues in a dreadful monotone, his speech peppered with inappropriate pauses as if he doesn't recognize his own punctuation:

"Now that you understand how to safely use your mission. Equipment after this briefing you will take it and report immediately to Hanger 139 on level 27b in LAV sector where you will be. Assigned to guard the Mark IV due to the sensitive nature. Of this machine the field testing has been moved forward and you will be solely responsible. For the Mark IV for only 24 hours after 24 hours a representative of Research and Development in LAV sector will arrive to take charge of the Mark IV more than likely. Myself. You are codenamed Task Force 451." He hands each of you Task- Force-451 Personnel Authorization Forms. [You keep these.]

He turns to King. "As acting mission leader your special equipment consists of one chronobot which will count down the time remaining in the mission. Until the field test you will be required to sign for the chronobot." He hands King a Standard Authorization and Responsibility Form which King readily signs.

"Fonz-R-ELI as chief communications officer you will sign for the Multicorder Unit plus Mikey." Another SARF.

"I understand Green-R-ROW. Is the chief weapons officer you will need. To sign for the weaponry and the

perimeter defence system." This time it's a Hazardous/Combustible Material Authorization and Responsibility Form.

[OCC: Trust me, everyone signs off appropriately for the sake of moving this along. Otherwise, the neurowhips come into play again. If anyone, wants to try and read the fine print, we'll give you a shot for questioning the wisdom of the Computer who issued these lovely forms. If for some reason you want to fuck with your signature, go ahead and pass that along, but remember that forgery and falsification of documents are treasonous.]

"Thank you this concludes your equipment briefing please. Proceed directly to the hanger with your crate of mission equipment if you would like to request further equipment beyond what is already included feel free to address that with Dram-O. At the front desk you may go."

The one Vulture goon uses an experimental anti-grav Lift-bot to haul the crate out of its crater and maneuver it to the door for you. Apparently, you can now move this one-ton puppy with just a little push.

Humm-V glances at his watch and then turns to an empty bench on the opposite side of the room and begins another lecture: "The most immediate danger you will face with the Chomp-Cannon III is the possibility of acid leaks which can only be remedied by..." The Green Vulture goon opens the door for you to leave, and six very anxious red troubleshooters run past you to settle on the bench and catch their equipment briefing.

IT'S LIKE CHRISTMAS

Mick begins pushing the crate back into a corner of PLC. "Oh Wow, everyone! Isn't this exciting?" Mick begins fumbling around looking for a way to open the crate.

GIMME, GIMME, GIMME

Christoph is hard at work completing an equipment requisition form.

Green approaches Dram-O and says in a very polite tone, "I would like a weaponry and perimeter defence system, please. You'll notice, I've already signed for it. I would also like two more blaster barrels and twenty hand grenades. Please?" Green bats his eyes at him.

Mick is still looking for a way to open the crate.

Dram-O slides a form to Green--"You'll have to fill this out to receive any ammunition." He then flips through a very large paperback book. After a moment he says, "The perimeter defence and the hand grenades are already

included in your package. If you feel the Computer has issued you inadequate equipment, I can find the grievance forms for you."

King is pulling out a sack of slick black equipment. "OK people, gather round. We have some issues to address before we move on."

DO I STUTTER?

King-R is still calling for everyone to gather round and look at his shiny toys.

Like obedient little toadies, Maury and Fonz jump to attention, although Maury keeps casting wistful glances at all that equipment behind the counter.

Christoph and Green hurriedly finish their requisition forms, and then also get in line. Christoph though stays far over to King's right where he can be close to Mick. Christoph watches closely as Mick still works on that crate.

Mick has found the latches that will allow him to pop the equipment crate open, and he starts to undo them. (This could take a bit--the crate is some six meters to a side.)

King pauses with his bag in hand and turns to Mick. He barks, "Mick-R-THY-4, I am not here for my health! For future reference, even when I am being polite, anything that comes out of my mouth is still an order. Is that clear to you, Sport? Or do have to come over there and drag you into this group?" I think that may be a rhetorical question.

ONLY WHEN YOU'RE NERVOUS

Mick immediately freezes. He walks over towards King, painfully having to tear his eyes from the crate. He gives King a pitiful look. "Oh Goodness, sir, I sincerely apologize if my behavior at all insinuated you may have to get up and physically force me to come over here. I simply thought I was going to save us all some time and open the equipment. I heartily apologize for the misunderstanding, sir. Let me simply make it clear that I am devoted to the computer, and thus devoted to you as team leader. What you are going to say sounds important, so I will simply be quiet and take notes."

Mick whips out his pad and begins writing.

'CAUSE I KNOW WHEN...

Mick looks up from his pad.

"I know an order when I hear one, so you just go ahead and talk. Me-- I'll just keep my wordhole shut."

DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME TWICE

Mick stops writing and mutters, "Nope, don't have to tell me when to follow orders. That's my forte, if you will."

He continues writing.

OH THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR...MAYBE IN A PAST LIFE

King sends a displeased glance Mick's way, but says nothing to him.

He opens a large sack which he apparently salvaged from King-1. "OK people." He's pulling out a complicated chart labeled "CPU-SSM-56: Troubleshooter Mortality Rates" He continues, "As you can see by this chart, we have just passed what is referred to as phase 2 of a typical mission. This blue line indicates the average mortality rate for a six person team by this phase--about 4%. The red lines indicate the upper and lower bounds of what would be the second and the 98th percentiles if each phase were represented as a standard bell curve."

There is still a green line (unexplained) that lies well above all the others (not even in shouting distance). King pauses to look each team member in the eye.

"This green line is our team." [OCC: where in hell did he get this chart?] "As you can see, we are well outside the normal range for phase 2 with a whopping 33% mortality rate."

"I have concluded that our problems stem from a lack of teamwork." He discards the chart and holds up a black sign with the word "TEAMWORK" in red in 20cm letters. "So we will be doing a little team- building exercise on our way to the hanger." He covers the word "WORK" with his hand, leaving just "TEAM." "Remember--there's no 'I' in 'TEAM.'"

King tosses the sign away and begins laying out new equipment for each of the other five group members. For Green, a gleaming black motorcycle helmet with the visor removed. For Christoph, a matching pair of wrap-around dark glasses. Mick-2, a pair of heavy black metal gauntlets that would reach almost to his elbows. For Fonz, a set of black thigh-high boots with platform soles. And for Maury, what looks like a black studded petbot collar.

For himself, King pulls out a 20 cm diameter flat black disk with grips on either side, and a dozen or so unlabelled buttons on top.

"Go ahead and put those on," King says, "and we'll get some practice in right away."

"Trust me--I've done this before, and everyone loves this."

NEW TOYS

Green looks around at his teammates and gingerly places the helmet on his head. He giggles, "I must look like Jacknick-O-LSN in 'Easy Rideher'."

Maury looks suspiciously at the collar.

"Just put it on," King urges. "It won't bite."

Fonz slides on the boots. They seemed clunky before, but are actually very striking on. Fonz does an experimental heel-toe, soft-shoe kind of thing and then says, "I guess these'll work."

Maury snaps on the collar.

Christoph puts on the glasses. He looks over the top of them at Mick and then glances at the crate.

Dram-O comes from behind the counter. "Oh, I'm glad you haven't left yet." He pushes a cardboard box at Green. "Here's part of your requested supplemental mission equipment: 2 blaster barrels, a 2 meter red scarf, and black mock-leather riding chaps." He checks his clipboard, "The rest is unavailable, but we will have it delivered as soon as we can secure authorization."

Mick and Christoph are exchanging glances. Christoph nods in Fonz's direction. Mick pulls on his gloves excitedly and works his way over to King with a wink and a nod to Christoph. Mick begins speaking with King, smiling animatedly at Christoph.

Mick whispers to King, then winks at Christoph and gives him a thumbs up. Wink, wink, nod, smile, wink, nod.

Green puts on the scarf and chaps, and the resemblance to Jacknick-O is really uncanny. Dram-O says, "Dashing, sir. I'll prepare the batcave." Dram-O walks off.

Christoph watches Dram-O leave and looks kind of pissed. He follows Dram-O for a bit as if to ask him a question, but stops when he reaches the crate and hurriedly begins undoing the clasps.

King appears not to notice as he is engrossed by that black disc of his.

Christoph stops halfway through the clasps as a look of panic washes over him. He gropes madly for a moment at the crate and falls over in his panic. He sits quietly by the crate looking around the room.

THE INSPECTOR

Mick begins experimenting with his gloves by thrusting his arms about in very impressive Karate- style swings. He extends one arm in front of him and shouts, "Go-go gadget arm!" After a few more moves and a couple more references to Powe-R-NGR, he turns to Green. He extends one hand, palm up and says, "Snatch the pebble from my hand, young Greenhopper."

MICK ACTS STRANGELY

Mick whips out his pad again and begins writing furiously. Then without warning, he drops his pad and pen to the floor and stands there limply beside King. Mick lets out a little yelp.

GREEN TAKES ACTION

Green puts one hand on his hip and furlfles his chin as he looks from King to Christoph to Mick then back to King. "What... does... it... mean..."

He suddenly yells "Attention! Green-R-ROW now attempting to disarm commie control freak!" He leaps at King and snatches the black disc from his hands.

Fonz crumples to the floor.

NON SEQUITER

King is struggling with Green to get his disk back. He orders, "Release my team builder, you Commie dupe! Fonz, Mick, Maury--assist me!"

Green pays him no mind.

Dram-O approaches Mick, acting as if Green and King are not there: "Here, sir," he says, offering a package, "Some of your requested supplemental equipment: 1000 stickers, 1 wiener-pet- bot, 30 meters of IntSec security tape (RED), and 6 red prop-style cranial caps." He pulls out a clipboard. "Of course, you'll have to sign for these."

Maury has begun dancing like Hamm-R again.

I JUST LIKE MY FOOD IN A BAG

Green stands there like a dumbass, staring hard into empty space. After a moment, he cocks his head and smiles. "Cooooool." He says this a little too loud.

King takes the opportunity to snatch his disk back.

Mick says to Dram, "I just like to sign with my mouth." He opens wide and motions for Dram to put the pen in his mouth and hold the form up to Mick's face. Mick signs and asks, "And if it's not too much trouble, could you put that pad in my pocket? I'm experimenting with an arm immobilizer at the moment."

Dram-O picks up Mick's pad, reads the top page, and then places the pad in Mick's inside jacket pocket for him. "Whooowee," he says, "you sure do write purty. That King guy must be one lucky feller."

"Jumpin' Jehosaphat! My legs! My legs!" shrieks Fonz. "All right, Mr. Team Leader, you've got some explaining to do, and fast! How do we know you're not some traitorous sociopath sent here to DESTROY OUR MISSION? All this chatter about teamwork!" he shouts, putting his hand protectively upon his gun. "We'll show you some teamwork, won't we boys?"

OH SHIT

Mick smiles brightly and shouts, "Mr. King, sir! I for one think this team building exercise is absolutely OUTSTANDING! You sir, are a true GENIUS when it comes to leading. May I simply say, that you outshine my humble skills as a morale officer."

Green is looking a little worried. He strolls casually over to Dram and places a hand on his shoulder, friendly-like, and says, "Hea Graaa, hoo waa wraammoooo boovaaaa baaa gaamawaaa?" Dram looks puzzled and pulls away. Frustrated, Green changes tactics. He moves over to Mick and puts an arm around his shoulders. "Heea Maaaag", Green drawls and then suddenly plunges a hand into Mick's jacket, and swiftly pulls out Mick's pad.

Maury has been doing his Hamm-R dance this whole time, but now it becomes clear that he was never actually dancing as he falls over and continues to twitch as flecks of white foam spray from his lips.

There is a sudden definite smell of defecation.

Maury appears to be trying to reach his laser.

WHAT EVER SHALL I DO?

Mick emits a high pitched wail as Green begins to read his pad. Mick begins rapidly spinning in circles near Green so that his limp arms spin outward and harmlessly flail Green. Mick screams, "Thief! Thief! This villain assaulted me. Help! Help!" Mick stops spinning and starts saying something to Green in a low voice.

Maury, now exhausted, sweaty, and still twitching draws his gun and fires. Where he is aiming is unclear, but the

shot nails Christoph square in the chest as he covers by the equipment crate.

[OCC: I'm kind of worried about Christoph. I haven't heard from him in over a week, so I figure he either: a) has died; b) has been too busy to check in; or c) is playing the Hide-In-The-Corner-Like-A-Pussy- Until-The-Action-Is-Over-And-Hope-I-Don't-Get-Hurt role. Either way, I'll be in Lincoln all this week, so I'll look him up.]

King is saying, "Perfect, you are all beginning to realize the extent of your own personal handicaps. The object, now, is to work as a team to overcome these individual weaknesses and proceed with our mission."

Green is ignoring both Mick and King and is still reading.

Mick tries to bite Green's nose off. Mick stumbles a little after the attempt. Green's nose is scratched and bleeding, but the damage is only cosmetic.

WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO?

Annoyed at being bitten, Green holds his nose and yells at Mick: "Yoo giz-aa baadaar!! Fmu yoo!" He rips off the front page of Mick's tablet, grabs Mick's left hand, and stuffs the now crumpled page into Mick's palm. Green roughly shoves Mick's paper-bearing hand down the front of his (Mick's) pants and then grabs Mick's other hand and makes it join the first. Lastly, Green places Mick's tablet neatly back in his jacket and steps back to survey the work with raised eyebrows.

TEiAM

Mick says, "Citizen Green, I commend you. Please let me return the favor." Mick turns to the rest of the group, "Everyone, Green and myself have come to a terrific agreement. Realizing that there truly is no 'I' in 'TEAM', we will work together to overcome his disability. Possessing a natural knack for understanding Green's new impaired speech, I will now translate for him when he needs to say something." Turning back to Green, Mick says, "I need to attend to some of my own buisness, but when you need me, just grunt."

Mick strolls over to his package and begins opening it with his teeth. He turns his body, keeping the package and its contents mostly out of the view of the remainder of the team.

PARDON ME...

Mick chews his lower lip. Smiling widely, still on his knees in front of his package, he turns to Fonz. "Oh,

pardon me Citizen Fonz. Could you wiggle your way over here for just a second?"

SOAPY WATER! THAT'S THE FIRST THING I TRIED!

Green tugs briefly at his helmet as if to take it off, but it steadfastly remains stuck to his head.

TWO BECOME ONE

Mick looks to Fonz, "Would you care for some assistance in traversing the distance, citizen? It would be my absolute pleasure to help you. I seem to be having some difficulty that you may be able to help me out with. I'd give you something valuable for your efforts."

I'M THROUGH WAITING!

"I ammm nooot an aaaaaniimaaaa!" Green screams nasally. He shoves an arrow under the helmet and use it as a pry bar. All he gets for his efforts is a nasty bleeding scratch along his neck. Failing that, he makes another grab for the disk King is holding, but King moves easily out of his reach.

Fonz half rolls to where Mick is and says, "What do you have in mind? I'll go along with anything, because I'm just a dumb tech and prefer to leave the thinking to better clones.

Maury struggles to his feet, laser still in hand, and his body begins to tremble again in a mild seizure. King looks at his disk. "Hmmm." he muses, "It was supposed to make him narcoleptic. I'll have to look into that." He addresses the rest of the group, "You're all doing just great. I'll give you a couple more minutes to regroup, and I'll meet you up at the hanger." He leaves.

Strangely, Christoph is not regenerating, and his chest is actually bleeding quite profusely. Christoph touches his chest gingerly in disbelief and seems to be crying softly to himself.

Maury, the hygiene officer, still has an obvious load of crap in his pants. He pulls some clothes from his bag and heads for the bathroom.

WHEELBARROW RACE

Still kneeling, Mick begins shoving Fonz with his head over to where his package lies open on the floor. "A little help if you could, please," Mick says with a grunt. "I really appreciate this."

Fonz can now see the contents of the package.

Maury enters the bathroom and closes the door behind him.

King has reached the main door to the hall and is leaving.

Christoph is moving cautiously toward Mick and Fonz, his crying now reduced to the occasional sob.

HIDE THE WEASEL

"Good sir, " Mick says, "if you could put those items into my jacket pockets, I would be more than happy to let you keep the surplus socks as reward for your efforts. Isn't teamwork wonderful?"

Fonz eagerly begins loading up Mick's pockets in anticipation of extra socks.

Christoph is moving cautiously toward Mick and Fonz, now with his laser out, aiming it jerkily at anything that makes noise. After each step, he pauses and scrunches up his face as if working on a fart. On the third try, he goes to a half squat and rips off a juicy one. Simultaneously, the hole in his chest begins to close (but very slowly).

Maury emerges from the bathroom looking sheepish. He throws the smelly RED bundle he's carrying into the nearest disposal chute.

Green is hotfooting it to the door after the departing King. Shortly, they are both gone.

NOBODY LEAVES WITHOUT SINGING THE BLUES

Mick says to Fonz, "Keep all the socks but one as a reward." He straightens up and addresses everyone, "Well, I must be off." Mick heads for the door.

A primal scream is heard from the hall.

Without warning, Maury's head explodes. Christoph starts at the sound and waves his laser blindly in the direction of Maury's fallen body.

Fonz is busy scooping up socks.

BOO!

Mick opens the door to the hall, and simultaneously, Green opens it from the other side. Mick and Green have just scared the shit out of each other, and they both jump and scream in unison.

Christoph tries to pull off his glasses and fails, and instead stumbles backward until he hits the equipment crate. He gropes blindly around the edges of the crate until he finds the first clasp. He undoes it and then moves to the next one.

A group of cleaning bots finally shows up. A half dozen of them emerge from a wall panel and begin dragging away the carnage of melees past.

WAGONS.....HO!

Green stuffs something in his pocket and looks up guiltily at Mick. Green brushes past Mick into PLC.

Fonz tentatively stands up. He looks at his feet. Well, he hasn't fallen over--so this must be OK. Fonz stands still and looks around.

Mick, as if remembering something, turns back around towards the crate. Cracking his knuckles, he begins clasping closed the clasps Christoph has opened. He says, "Christoph, maybe you are forgetting, but we are under direct orders from the computer to not open this until we reach the hanger. Wouldn't it be super if we carried out that mission together?" Mick begins pushing the crate, singing softly to himself: "I've got no strings to hold me down. Shut up you bitch, you vile bitch. I've got no strings on me."

NEXT!

Another group of troubleshooters enter PLC. They are all RED clearance and have a couple of INFRAREDS with them (presumably for gruntwork--they're cheaper than bots). The group glances around casually at the numerous bodies strewn about and the crew of scrubbots cleaning them up. The INFRAREDS look decidedly nervous. The team leader approaches the counter and hands over a mission requisition form.

KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU

Mick is pushing the crate smoothly to the door, leaving Christoph groping air and wondering where his crate went.

Green merely waits by the door with his hands shoved in his pockets.

The scrubbots--quick and efficient little bastards that they are--have removed all the bodies and are now working on the most stubborn stains.

Fonz raises his two fists full of socks over his head, and shaking them yells, "I am the Dancing Queen!"

The freshfaced troubleshooters in the new group all turn to stare at Fonz. Fonz drops his arms and seems suddenly surprised to be in PLC. "Sorry," he says, "I haven't been myself." He stuffs the socks in his jacket and moves to help Mick.

Chapter VI-Presenting...

SUPER JOB!

Mick pushes the crate out the door. He says to Fonz, "A fine job, citizen friend." Still pushing the box, Mick reaches into his uniform and pulls out a smiley-faced sticker that says "I WORK WELL WITH OTHERS!". Mick sticks it to Fonz's forehead.

CLONEJACKING

Mick and Fonz are already in the hall with the crate, headed for the hanger.

Christoph stumbles into the troubleshooter group at the counter. Nearly falling, he grabs one of the INFRAREDS for support.

"My guide, my guide!" Christoph shouts enthusiastically. "Thank the Computer, I thought I'd be lost forever."

Christoph leans in toward the confused INFRARED and says, "Hurry, Citizen, follow that crate. We've no time to lose."

Arm in arm, they start toward the hall.

LEGGO MY CLONE-O

One of the REDs in the new troubleshooter group says, "Pardon me, Citizen, but I believe you've mistakenly grabbed our drone."

SHE THINKS THE MONKEY IS THE SULTAN

Mick rushes back to Christoph. Looking at the other party Mick apologizes, "Sorry fellows. He's been intentionally crippled as an experiment by the computer itself. Musn't mess with the experiment, if you know what I mean." Grabbing Christoph by the shoulder and arm, Mick begins to lead him out to the hall with the crate. "Dear, dear Christoph. If you wanted to be near the crate, you simply had to ask. Let's continue to the hanger. Fonz, would you mind pushing the crate while I lead our curious little friend here?"

Mick slaps three Morale Stickers on Christoph's back. The first is a sad face which says, "I need improvement in cooperation skills." The second is a crying face which says, "I need a friend on my 'special' days." The third shows a hand turning off a bedside lamp and says, "Remember, anytime can be a Summer's Eve."

Green is merely watching everything with an amused smile.

Fonz suddenly collapses again, rolling under the crate's floating lift.

One of Mick's gloves falls off [the left one].

GASP!

Fonz rolls over and tentatively stands. His legs appear to be holding his weight so he goes back to pushing the crate up to the hanger.

Mick places the confused Christoph's hand on the back of the crate. "See, honey, you're crate's right here. You just keep your hand there and follow along."

Mick himself begins pushing.

Green is still in the PLC doorway. In a strained voice he says, "Must!...Fight!...Cannot!...Give!...In!" Then he visibly relaxes and follows the group.

Around the first corner is King. King is lying on his face in the middle of the corridor in a pool of blood. He has dried blood on the sides of his head as if it ran from his ears. His stiff fingers are clutching a note.

THE KING IS DEAD

Green cries: "Oh, my Computer! King, King, speak to me! Who did this terrible thing?! Alas, woe, alack, the noon hour darkens upon this loss, this rolling stone shall gather no moss. Oh frabjuous day! Who will cry for him? Who among us? I shall, yea, for he was a good man, a righteous man, baby can you dig your man, and his work must be carried on! Carried on shoulders that couldn't begin to dare to compare to those sturdy, manly, tan and corded, yummy, mmmm... but must nonetheless, for in the eyes of the Computer, and in trust of the people here surrounding the sorrow for which we now bow our heads in sorrow and sadness, contemplating the sadness of existence and the shortness of being, and indeed the heaviness of the leadership which bore down on those great and mighty shoulders from which we now lift the onus and place it down upon another, yea, and that other shall bear the burden, like a bore, and bare a smile, and smile I shall, for the pain of leadership is sweet, it hurts so good! For I am Green-R-ROW, and I have spoken!!"

Green falls to his knees, cradling King's head in his lap, and hums a soft sad little tune.

RHETORIC AT 10 PACES

Mick pulls out his pad and begins writing something while he furrows his brow. He glances at Green and purses his lips.

He tugs briefly at his remaining glove, then Mick flips to the next page and continues writing. He says, "Sufferin Silicon, now that's enthusiasm, Green! While I'm not sure what this 'stone' and 'moss' talk is, I am fairly certain we should wait here until the next King clone reports. Maybe he will show up with a directive from the computer as to who is to assume the weighty burden of leadership. As for now, I'm afraid I'll have to step in here as morale officer and professionally declare you too distraught over the death of your close friend King to assume such painful responsibilities. Considering that Maury keeps soiling himself, Christoph is acting as if he weren't participating much anyway, and Fonz is happily going about his business with the crate. I feel duty bound to accept the job as leader until further notice from the computer."

Mick stops writing, puts his pad back in his uniform and says, "All right then, men. To the hanger!" Mick begins marching exuberantly, Christoph in tow, and waves for the others to follow.

(NONE)

Green sniffs and wipes the tears from his eyes. "Fuckin' lawyers," he whines. Veins are standing out on his forehead and his fists can be seen clenching and unclenching in his pockets.

Fonz begins bouncing and jumping up and down repeatedly. Fonz looks very confused.

Mick begins swinging his gloved fist over his head as if threatening Green.

Green falls to his knees and grabs his ears in obvious pain.

HASSAN CHOP!

Mick grabs the note from King, reads it and stuffs it in his pocket. He begins speaking softly, "Citizen Green-R-ROW, I find you guilty of the murder of King-R-THR-2." Slowly he gets louder, "Oh yeah, you scumbag, two-faced, secret-society-lovin', marxist-dogma-rememberin', webbed-toe-hidin', smegma-lickin' TRAITOR!" Mick is swinging his gloved arm in a circle very fast. "YOU THINK I FORGOT? LISTEN, BABY, THE LIST NEVER FORGETS! HAHA! LIKE THE POOPER OF A MOTHER FUCKING ELEPHANT, BABY! THAT'S THE FUCKING LIST! GREEN EQUALS TWENTY CHECKS! TWENTY CHECKS!"

THE NOTE

"Dear computer, I couldn't hide it anymore, and I couldn't live with the shame. Forgive me and my successors, and I think Green-R-ROW would be a fine team leader. I love you, my love is a burning fire, it burns me with desire.

Yours always, King

PS. sorry about the blood, it's my fault, not Green's"

ARE TOO!

[OCC: Pete claims he is NOT smegma-lickin']

On his knees and still in obvious pain, Green scrabbles away from Mick. Whimpering and moaning, he jams his hands repeatedly into his pockets yelling, "Please!...Please!"

Wispy green smoke is rising from behind Christoph's glasses. "Disks and fucking diodes!" he yells, flinging the cursed glasses violently from himself. The burnt and blind sockets of his eyes are now revealed, tendrils of Green smoke still curling around his temples.

With one hand still twitching and grasping in his pocket, Green's other hand goes for his laser. He drops heavily onto his side and rolls over staring at the ceiling. He lets out a weak, "mother." A hissing sound comes from his helmet as some sort of catch releases, and painfully loud squealing bursts from speakers inside the helmet for a brief moment before fading out and shutting off entirely.

Fonz yells, "I can't stop them!" and runs down the hall in the direction of the hanger. He shortly passes out of sight around a corner.

Mick has spent this whole time swinging his gloved fist over his head. The glove has slowly built up a red glow that casts an eerie light over the group. The glow now cuts out, and the fist falls limply to Mick's side.

Green's sighs softly.

LIMP MICK

Mick looks at his limp arm and then to Green. "Hmmm. Uh, Green, I don't want to impose on you, but would you do me a big favor and shoot yourself? It appears my Menacing Limb of Swirling Death has failed on me, and you still need to be executed. I figured I'd let you have the honor of doing the deed yourself."

Green stands up, wobbly, and walks over to Mick. With a hand on his shoulder, Green commiserates with Mick--

"It's okay, really. Your fist of leadership has wilted. I envy you, really. Few men have the opportunity to be tested and know their limits. And now you are a powerful team member because you know just how far the limits of your courage will extend. I salute your self-discovery, Mick!" Then Green backs off and says, "Come on, men! Bring the package! Grab Christoph, O gloved one!"

Green takes a tentative tug at his helmet, pulls it off, and carries it loosely under one arm as he saunters down the hall toward the hanger.

ILL BE THE COYOTE

Fonz continues to run at top speed until he reaches the giant clamshell doors that open onto the hanger. Without breaking stride Fonz slams face-on into the doors and falls unconscious to the floor. Like a dog dreaming of rabbits, Fonz's legs continue to wheel impotently.

HARD SPHERE/PLIABLE PLANE/RIGID CUTTING TOOL

Mick is visibly uncomfortable with Green's comments. "Citizen Green, I personally think it is just faboo that you can deal with your own inner turmoil in such a productive manner. Practically, though, we have a problem. You obviously killed King and we only have King's note accusing you of the murder..." He pauses and rubs his face enthusiastically with his good hand. "I know you're a man of honor, so I have a splendiferous proposal. Let's settle this like men of honor-- we'll play hard sphere/pliable plane/rigid cutting tool to determine the outcome. If you win, then it is the computer's will for you to be leader. If I win you must be executed for your murderous ways."

[OCC: Hard sphere is represented by a fist and beats Rigid Cutting Tool. Rigid Cutting Tool is represented by the first two fingers extended outward and beats Pliable Plane. Pliable Plane is represented by a flat hand and beats Hard Sphere.]

CURSES, FOILED AGAIN

Green says, "An interesting ploy, but I'm afraid it's a little too late for that. Your dilly-dallying and counterproductivity are becoming suspicious, and I'm wondering what agenda you have in mind other than carrying out the Computer's will." Green gives Mick a good hard stare and lets the question hang in the air between us, pregnant with significance. Rife with meaning. Utterly gravid with symbolism. Gravid!!!

When Mick fails to answer, Green lightens his tack. "Well I hope your change of heart lasts. That obstructivist

attitude can only be dangerous to the team's welfare. Not to mention your own."

Green looks around, "Okay, everybody who wants to end this silly conversation right now, raise both arms!" Green and Christoph raise two arms each, while Mick merely looks at his gloved hand. Green scampers down the hallway after Fonz.

LIFE GOES ON

Mick looks at Green with only a smile. He pulls out his pad and uselessly flails his bad hand against it. With only a flash of frustration he follows the others. "Hey, guys! Wait for me! Do you need any help with anything citizen Green?"

Christoph follows the voices obediently. Pink blobby masses have covered his eyes. He'll probably have new ones soon.

ANTICIPATION

Mick, Green and Christoph round the last corner before the hanger, Mick and Christoph working together to move the crate. Christoph has some new eyes, but the wound in his chest still looks like protein-paste.

As they walk up to the gigantic clamshell doors to the hanger they can see Fonz getting up from the floor and rubbing a rather large bump on his head. Fonz is limping, but otherwise his legs seem to work.

Fonz says, "Glad you all could make it", and hits the button to open the doors. They begin to swing slowly outward toward the group.

WHO INVITED HIM?

The doors are still swinging silently, slowly outward. Only darkness can be seen through the growing gap, and the echoed creaks and whispers from inside speak of a vast, cavernous space within.

King-R-THR-3 arrives and claps Mick on the back, vigorously shaking Mick's dead hand: "Thanks Mick, I'll take over from here."

King stands in front of the doors and waits.

TYPICAL

Mick runs up beside King and begins shouting, "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! All rise for the honorable King-R-THR-3! It is this humble citizen's honor to present to you the most

rockin', the most shockin', the most big, bad, grandfather-clockin'. Give it up forrrrrrrrr- KING! Hip Hip Huzzah! Hip Hip Huzzah!" With a flush of revelry, Mick pulls out a sticker and places it on his chest. The sticker says in bold letters, which are very small due to the amount of writing, "Honk if You Love Your Computer Designated Authority Figure." Mick looks around at everyone expectantly.

STUNNED SILENCE

The doors are open.

Within... a cavernous hangar usually used to house a full Vulture Squadron. Now, there is only one vehicle, Mark IV. One 75-meter-long, 25-meter-wide 40,000 ton vehicle, mounted on six monstrous treads, and bristling with dual-mount vapoguns, grenade launchers, rapid-fire tacnuke cannons, and one huge MegaGun.

The lights come on to reveal the Mark IV in its full glory.