

Episode Zero - Welcome to the Universe

Cast (Act 1, Act 2)

Jon: Roland Dean, Eddie Deschain

Kris: Jack Carter, Jason Braddock

Jesse: Madame Chutney, Waterfall Harris

Mac: Dexter Jones, Toby Williams

Tree: Hannah Aku, Evie Waruie

Alex: Lee Minors, Eugene 'Gene' Hackman

Matt: Malachi, Jonathan Douglass

Wayne:

Chapter One – The Assignment

(7:00pm)

Each of the players will first make a copy of their character sheet. On the copy, all bonuses will be doubled. All hit points will be doubled, and all calculations will be remade. Do not add new skills, just double ranks. Double all bonuses to armor class, but leave all penalties as normal. The second sheet will be set aside for later use.

Each of the players gets a Secret Agenda.

Secret Agendas

Several years ago, a good friend and business partner of yours went missing. Just before the disappearance, he told you about a company in Mexico he had begun dealing with: Planeta Verde. You suspected foul play, but the government agencies trying to find your friend have ignored your suggestions to investigate Planeta Verde. Instead they decided something from his distant, drug-using past caught up to him.

Several years ago you heard rumors that someone created a clone using your genetic material. You disregarded it, because you couldn't think of any reason someone would do something like that to you. However, the rumor wouldn't go away, and you have now heard it from multiple sources. The common thread is an organization called "The Gemini Syndicate" but you have never heard of them before.

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suggestions to investigate Planeta Verde. Instead they decided something from his distant, drug-using past caught up to him.

One month ago, a man claiming to be with an organization called "The Gemini Syndicate" contacted you. He claimed to have information that "you wouldn't want to be made public". There were several things that came to mind – not all of them career ending – but the man would not tell you what his information was. He asked for payment beginning next season.

Several years ago, you overheard two well-dressed men talking in hushed tones about something called "The Gemini Syndicate". You didn't think much of it other than an interesting train conversation, but in the years since, you've innocently referenced them in stories you have told about yourself. (You embellished a bit.) In the last few months, you've heard that name come up again, and have attempted to find more information.

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Call to Action

After a long day at work, the players are phoned. Pick someone, probably Kris. Generically, the call goes like this:

"Good afternoon. You don't know who this is, but I work for the United States government. We have the opportunity to strike a blow at an organization that wants to do great harm to this country and its people, and we think you can help. You may have the opportunity to learn a few things along the way – answers to questions that might be important to you. Are you interested?"

"Very good! You will be compensated, of course. We will have an organizational meeting next Thursday at 7pm in Tempe, Arizona. Plan to be away for several days. More details will follow. We are so glad to have you along!"

The meeting is scheduled for next week, so they can wrap up any work they are doing. After the phone

call, a text message comes through listing the following: E. Broadway Rd & S. Dorsey Ln. SE Corner. Suite #235.

Finalize equipment and characters, and everyone can explain how they are getting to Arizona. Once there, a nice receptionist points them in the direction of a conference room. Coffee, tea, and cookies are laid out, and six comfortable chairs circle the table.

As soon as the last of you sits down, there is a muffled WHUMP sound near the door. As you turn around, the door is closed, and an elderly looking man stands before it with a pleasant grin.

“Thank you all for coming. Please, have some cookies. Macaroon! My favorite.” He helps himself to one. His voice is the same as the person you spoke to over the phone.

He sits down at the head of the table into a chair that you are fairly certain was not there a moment ago. You are at once put off by the weirdness, but also relaxed by the old man’s pleasant demeanor. His smile fades as he finishes his cookie. “There is an organization – some of you have heard of it – called The Gemini Syndicate. They have many business fronts, from Planeta Verde to Costco. Each of them just legitimate enough to keep out of trouble. All of you have had dealings with them in the past, even if you didn’t know it at the time.”

He makes eye contact with each of you. “We have an opportunity to gather some major intelligence about their global operations. Possibly enough to bring a stop to some of the more appalling activities they conduct here. It will be dangerous, but I think you have the tools needed. Shall I go on?”

If anyone asks:

- The last time his Department had an opportunity like this, the military was used and they botched it. This time, they are using something a bit less obvious.
- He refers to his part of the government as “The Department” and doesn’t reveal anything else.

Assuming no one has any objections, he lays out the plan:

The Gemini Syndicate has just purchase a research facility from Pfizer Mexico. They have begun moving in, but many of the old Pfizer security systems are still in place. The Department has procured an access badge that will allow entrance to

the IT building. Once inside, you must find the server room and install a small piece of hardware. The hardware will allow unlimited access to the entire Syndicate network – you must download as much as possible and get out before the network administrators notice something is wrong. We estimate that would be about fifteen minutes, which should be enough time to dump enough data for the Department’s needs, as well as run a few queries if needed.

The Pfizer Mexico site is in Altar, Mexico. “You kids have got the Googles now, you don’t need me to tell you where that city is. One other thing though – you can expect some strange happenings down there. Not everything is as it seems.” With that cryptic warning, he departs, leaving the keys to a big black Suburban.

Chapter Two – The Trip to Pfizer

(7:30pm)

Nothing happens on the way to the border, and not much happens on the Mexican Freeways. They aren’t even stopped by the Federales. However, when the terrain gets mountainous and the climate gets snowy, they encounter a roadblock: several trees have been placed in the road. Snow makes going around improbable. The team will have to move the trees by pulling them with the Suburban.

When they exit the vehicle, the clock starts ticking. After four rounds, the mountain troglodytes attack. Some use just claws, while others have javelins, shotguns, or tasers. They all appear to be in some kind of drug-induced frenzy, and wear enough clothing to mask their non-human nature.

4 Troglodyte: CR 1, 13 hp, Defense 15, touch 9. BAB +1. Attack +1 melee (1d4, claw); full attack +1 melee (1d4, 2 claws), -1 melee (1d4 bite) or +0 Ranged (1d6 javelin). SV Fort +5 Ref +1, Will +0. AP 0. 10, 9, 14, 8, 10, 10. Loot: 4 Javelins.

2 Troglodyte Dedicated Hero 3/Field Medic 1: CR 5, 35 hp, Defense 19, touch 13. BAB +3. Attack +3 melee (1d4, claw); full attack +3 melee (1d4, 2 claws), +1 melee (1d4 bite) or +4 Ranged (2d8 Remington shotgun) or +4 Ranged (1d4 electrical plus paralysis, taser). SV Fort +9 Ref +2, Will +3. AP 2. 10, 10, 14, 8, 10, 10. Loot: 3 rusty shotguns, 12 rounds, 2 tasers.

After the troglodytes are dispatched, the group can proceed to Altar without incident.

Chapter Three – Office Crawl (8:00pm)

The old Pfizer buildings are easy to find once the team arrives in Altar. They are the largest buildings on the north outskirts of town. Most have the old Pfizer logo removed, but a few still sport the blue oval. Many cars move in and out of the parking lots, and many locals are employed there.

There are two green painted vans near the entrance to the parking lot complex. One of them moves to follow the Suburban unless measures are taken.

At the reception desk, a woman with slicked red hair, a green suit and dark sunglasses asks what their business is. She has a sense motive of +4. She cannot be bribed, but isn't very bright.

Each round in the building, all players roll a d10.

- If two numbers match, they encounter a security detail that must be dealt with quietly. They are well-build men with red hair, green uniforms and dark sunglasses (see below). Sunglasses protect pale (low pigment) eyes.
- If three numbers match or they have been in the building looking around long enough, they have found the server room.

2 Security Guards: CR 6, 39 hp, Defense 19, touch 13. BAB +4. Attack +4 melee (1d6, baton); full attack +4 melee (1d4, 2 batons) or +5 Ranged (1d4 electrical plus paralysis, taser). SV Fort +9 Ref +2, Will +3. AP 2. 12, 10, 14, 8, 10, 10. Loot: 2 badges, radios, batons, and tasers.

Chapter Four – The Download (8:30pm)

Once inside the server room, one of the team members must make a DC 20 relevant check to install the hardware. They are interrupted once by an innocent IT guy, but other than that they have free run. The IT guy can be bluffed, intimidated, or anything really (DC15).

Once the download starts, the team members have the opportunity to answer the questions in their Secret Agendas.

Chapter Five – The End (9:00pm)

Once the 15 minutes is up, pause and ask if everyone has a good feel for the game. If there are no questions, continue:

As you disconnect the hardware from the server, the lights in the room go off. The constant humming of

the server farm around you winds down to silence. As your eyes begin to adjust, there is a brief flash of light – double doors open and [check to see who is closest to the doors] is pulled from the room! As you move toward the light, the doors crash closed once again and you hear electronic locks cycling. After another heartbeat of silence, there is a crackle of static as the loudspeaker overhead turns on.

“Thank you for bringing us a new toy to play with. The Department is too kind.” Another voice, very similar continues, “We will put it to good use!” [Xxxx]’s screams echo down the hallway as you begin feeling for a way out...

The curtain closes on the first act.

Intermission

Chapter Six – The Beginning (9:15pm)

Have all players set aside the copies and then grab their original character sheets. There will be another alteration, this time less fun: All characters subtract 3 from Str and Con, then 1 from the remaining attributes. (If the whining gets too much, let them know that this is a temporary change, and will be restored in the future.)

Then pick someone, probably Jon.

Eddie, you are awoken by the morning sun streaming through your window. Through the grogginess, you put together that it is Saturday and there is really no reason to get up. But the sun reflecting off your Ronald Dean poster is too much for you, and you think you can smell pancakes. You climb out from the bottom of your bunk bed as your mother enters your room with a very worried look on her face.

She turns to your father, who has followed her down the hall, then back to you. “A bird just flew into the kitchen and dropped this. I think it’s for you.”

Give Jon, then everyone else, the invitation letter. Note that everyone has a similar experience.

Players will receive notice in a few days that a chaperone will be escorting the students to purchase supplies and taking them to the train station. Parents will only be responsible for taking the students to Las Vegas, Nevada. From there, they will be cared for until winter break.

Chapter Seven – The Other Strip

(9:45pm)

Once in Vegas, the group is collected by a nicely dressed gentleman in a large black Suburban. Others refer to him as Lord Caperon. He is able to answer a few questions, but says “you’ll find out soon enough” a lot. From the airport, he drives down the strip and makes a right turn into a parking structure. After a few circles, the car emerges back onto a street, but it’s quite different from Las Vegas Boulevard. He explains that this is the Sliver – a very narrow road that runs alongside the main Vegas drag. It winds in and out of the casinos, and the normal folks seem to not notice it.

Lord Caperon takes everyone around to purchase things from your list, stopping finally at Edison’s Wand Shop.

“Well now, we’ve put this off long enough. In ya go, I’ll be waiting out here.” Inside the small foiyay (!) is an older gentleman behind a counter. He has a malicious smirk on his face as your group comes in.

“Very well, who wants to be first in the room?”

He leads the volunteer (or the person closest to the desk) into the back, then closes the door and returns to the front. He waits and eagerly anticipates the reaction from the rest of you.

Inside the room it is dark. You are a bit frightened. You hear the sound of a rolling pencil off in the distance, but in the darkness there is no way to judge how far away. Then something hits you. As you spin around, more and more sharp objects begin impacting on your body. You turn to cover your head and are jabbed repeatedly in the ribs! The sound and pain of hundreds of wands slamming into your flesh begins to drive you out of your mind! It builds until you cry out, and then... [roll 1d6 for hit location]

A wand sticks to you. The others bounce and roll away, and the door to the entry opens before you. You find you have a [1d12] wand, and as you exit, the man behind the counter peers at it and says, “[1d8] core. Interesting. Next!”

For hit location (1d6):

1. Sticks in hair
2. Sticks in teeth
3. Palm of hand

4. Slides into pocket
5. Jams into shoe
6. Slips behind ear

For Shell Type (1d12):

1. Mahogany
2. Cherry
3. Oak
4. Maple
5. Cedar
6. Pine
7. Elm
8. Ash
9. Bamboo
10. Ebony
11. Redwood
12. Beachwood

For Internal Component (1d8):

1. Unicorn Hair
2. Phoenix Feather
3. Dragon Heartstring
4. Chimera Fur
5. Griffon Feather
6. Dryad Leaf
7. Minotaur Fur
8. Centaur Tail

Components will have an effect on casting, TBD.

After the ordeal with the Wand Shop, Lord Caperon leads you to the train station. “Right through there – past Quark’s Bar, and turn left at the end of the stairs. Careful not to let anyone see you walk through the wall. I’ve got some errands to run, but I’m sure I’ll see you at the school.” He drives away leaving you outside the Hilton.

Chapter Eight – The Train Job

(10:15pm)

- Magnetic/Magic Bullet Train
- North about 35 minutes
- 15 in, attack by red-haired, glasses-wearing folks

About fifteen minutes after departing Las Vegas, the train begins to slow. [Int checks] You recall that the ride was supposed to be thirty-five minutes. After looking out the window and confirming that you are still in the middle of nowhere, an older student opens your cabin door.

“You firsties stay in here where it is safe.” With that, he closes the door and moves down the car.

If they players try anything, they will first have to open the door. It is being held shut by an invader. “What are you, like eight??”

- Players distract one of them long enough for the Car Monitor to cast a spell (incendio) on him
- Rival kid says he wishes that they would have been successful; he wants to be one of the converted.

Chapter Nine – The Real Setting

(11:00pm)

- Glass building, built into a mountain, overlooking a river and marsh
- Large banquet
- Four tables: Three House plus the first year students
- “Sorting” will happen next time

End *(11:30am)*