“So what’s the murders per capita in this shithole?” asked Arthur, giving me a goofy grin.

“Uh, pretty low,” I said. “If you’re comparing it to real life, it would be staggeringly low.”

He frowned at me. “The way it was described to us, it was supposed to be a place where the gutters ran red with blood,” he said. “Drow blood, but still.”

“This is some worldbuilding thing, isn’t it?” asked Reimer. He set down his pencil. “Go on, do your rant.”

“Can I use my phone while you go through this?” asked Craig. His hand was already on it.

“Uh, *may* you,” I replied. “And no. I’m not going to give some boring TED talk about it, it’s just a function of what’s in the books.”

“I want to hear,” said Maddie.

“Veto,” said Craig.

“If you don’t want to explain it, don’t explain it,” said Reimer. “But that’s bait, it’s *obvious* bait, so *if* you don’t want to explain it, don’t say things like ‘it’s just a function of what’s in the books’, like you’re fucking Sherlock Holmes about to explain his masterstroke. Emphasis on stroke.”

“There’s a limit on how high a death rate can be while still sustaining a functional economy,” I said. “And even if you’re not thinking about the economy, then you at least have to be thinking about replacement rates. If you look at historic cities with really high death rates, I’m about ninety percent sure that you’d be looking at a few different types of scenarios, stuff like war or disease, or brief periods of brutal regimes. Some of those examples you’d be looking at would be with replacement population flooding in from somewhere else, growth from immigrants offsetting murders. But those don’t apply to a drow city, because where would more drow be coming from? Nowhere, the city is self-contained.”

Craig raised his hand. “Is this going to be on the test?”

“I’m taking this as scene setting,” said Arthur, frowning a bit.

“The question was how high the murders per capita were,” I said. “I’m just explaining things that your characters are seeing, or figuring out, or learning with an Investigation check.”

“There are other explanations,” said Tiff. She was slouched in her chair a bit, and had been doodling in her notebook. The no phones rule helped a lot with people being distracted, but you still eventually got stuff like dice stacking, doodling, and browsing rulebooks when people weren’t into the session. For whatever reason, Tiff wasn’t into it, but we had enough people that it wasn’t a huge deal.

“Go ahead,” I said, after waiting a second for her.

She sat up a bit. “Your question is death rate against growth rate,” she said. “First thing you could do is just make all of the drow die from murder, instead of … heart disease, or whatever the current top killer is. Second thing you could do is make growth really, really high. Drow matrons pump out a lot of kids, then most of them die before reproducing.”

“The first works, but it’s not high enough,” I said. “I ran the numbers. Second is really not like the drow.”

“And when have you ever hewed to the books?” asked Tiff.

“Should be hewn,” said Arthur.

“If I wanted a species that didn’t feel like drow, then I would just make a new species,” I said. “But if you take drow and make them ultrafast breeders just to try to justify how many deaths they have … it doesn’t work. The truth is, there’s no way for a city to be at the appropriate level of violence and murder without special circumstances or a continual influx of population that’s somehow happening in spite of a ludicrously high murder rate.”

It was one of those awkward arguments, the kind that I didn’t like when I looked back on it, but which had passed easily enough. No one had really been mad at each other, but it had been uncomfortable, and even running it over in my head afterward, I didn’t know quite how I could have fixed it.

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Dorisopolis didn’t have a formal name, but that was what everyone called it. The Republic of Doris Finch was in some respects a failed state, but in other respects was just a bunch of customs and understandings without a formal government at all. A better analogy might have been a collection of gangs, though that wasn’t quite right either, because the unique nature of her power meant that a new gang could spring up within a matter of minutes. In a lot of ways, it was unlike any other place on Aerb, and definitely unlike any place on Earth.

There were elements of Aerb that I would have argued were grimdark, but we’d had a long D&D session back on Earth arguing the definition of that term, and a lot of it was about the tone of the writing and where it put focus, rather than any particular facts about the setting. If I was looking at Aerb in general, I might be tempted to call it grimdark, because their motorcycles ran on souls, nine thousand hells, and the looming threat of the exclusionary principle coming to crush cities and strip out industries. But in terms of my actual adventure, I wasn’t so sure.

If that book the Dungeon Master had shown me, *Worth the Candle* by Juniper Smith, was written in my authentic voice, I had to believe I wouldn’t have just glossed over all the mundane stuff. The book of my adventures on Aerb would have had some grim and dark stuff, but it wouldn’t have been *only* that, not unless you were willing to cut out playing Ranks with Grak, or Amaryllis introducing me to rock climbing, or the long conversation that Fenn and I had about why anyone would voluntarily use the awesome power of the internet to watch some stranger
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play a videogame (and yeah, it would have taken twenty pages and then abruptly ended with a sex scene, but I would have included it all the same). My actual experience of Aerb had its moments of grimdarkness, but on the whole? When I went into any major metropolitan area, I never got the sense that people were trudging along, burdened by the knowledge that this was a world in decline. They seemed like people. Maybe some of them were just coping, and to be fair, my exposure to 'normal people' was low, but it seemed like most of the problems were far away, easy to forget about if you wanted to.

But this is all by way of saying that the DFEZ was way past grimdark, and Dorisopolis was the worst of it. It was more mortal suffering than had existed in any actual city on Earth, made possible only because these bodies came cheap, and were one of the only reliable resources in the place. Doris Finch had her personal problems, and that meant every single citizen of the city had those *same* personal problems, like you took the least trustworthy, most cutthroat person in New York City and then multiplied them to blanket Manhattan. It was insanity, and we were walking through it.

The buildings were all magestone, built tall, but without any kind of plan in place, and a few of them had tipped or been collapsed, leaving them leaning sideways. Steel magic made ugly buildings, unless you were trying hard or willing to put in work to make a facade, and neither of those were the case in Dorisopolis. I was a little bit leery of even going into the city, not just because of the proliferation of void weapons and how many spots there would be to take pot shots at us, but because there was a very real possibility that one of those buildings would collapse. You could do that kind of work with star magic, given enough time and paint.

There didn't seem to be much in the way of basic sanitation, and there were so many corpses all around that in a few places they formed impromptu gardens, with all the specialized fauna that had taken hold in the EZ to feast on the bounty. Where people needed to walk, the place wasn't quite clear of bodies: instead, it was flattened muck, muck which must have been corpses at some point, if I had my guess. I saw vermin as well, featherless birds and rats with shells, or close enough that I wasn't going to quibble on taxonomy.

"It's better further in," said Star Doris. "Downtown, there's enough entad support to keep things clean." It almost sounded like an apology. I'd issued a few apologies like that, when people came over and saw how messy my room was. This was obviously different, and on an entirely different magnitude, but it was still surprising to me, because it was an admission that this was, in some way, her fault.

To be honest, I was a bit worried about the possibilities of disease. The Dorises were a monoculture, which made them ripe for it, and with the combination of poor sanitation and rampant cannibalism, it was a breeding ground for pathogens. The two big things keeping that in check were isolation and pustule magic. Barely any people came into the zone, and obviously no one left it, but it was my understanding that even something like a mild cold could rip through the Dorises. Pustule magic was the other big check, and had supposedly been learned under extreme crunch by a Doris when someone had unleashed a plague on them. Normal pustule

mages weren't much good at dealing with diseases or maladies on other people, but the normal rules got a little fuzzy when you were talking about clones, and a Pustule Doris could strip out (or add in) illnesses from one of the others, which was one of the ways that the Dorises attempted to maintain control over each other.

There were very few diseases that would have been more than a mild inconvenience for me, given all the resources at our disposal, so a lot of my worry was just my regular human brain not having updated to the sheer breadth and depth of resources that I had available to me, with a tiny sliver left over for how worried I actually should have been about rare or magical viruses that the population of Dorises was harboring.

We saw a lot of them, coming in, and with the Crown of Eyes, I was fully aware of the closer ones that I might not have noticed with my normal senses or vibration magic. Many of them were watching us, but more were simply going about their business, which largely seemed to consist of manual labor of one kind or the other. There was a lot that the Dorises didn't have, in part because the EZ had been wrecked a long time ago. The only things left in it were those that they had no use for, or which could survive in their direct possession. They made up for this, in part, by harvesting themselves, and quite a bit of their work was simply in turning a human body into something that would be useful. This included skinning and tanning, making tools from bone, rendering fats for oils, and using hair for textiles. A lot of those things, a human body wasn't really good for, but you work with what you have, I guess. I kept expecting to see the Dorises engaged in some kind of art, either its production or consumption, but I only saw a single painting in any of the homes, and that had clearly been done in the shades of what could be extracted from a human.

The smell, as you might imagine, was atrocious. The Dorises didn't have plumbing, which meant that they were at the mercy of the rain in order to gather water in steel mage cisterns. Even if a thunderstorm had come, I was sure that it wouldn't be enough to wash everything away, not when there was a distinct lack of gutters, and obviously no functional stormwater system set up. I had read that the Empire of Common Cause had briefly engaged in a campaign of water deprivation, accomplished by a relatively small handful of water mages, but all it had done was to make the Dorises spawn and kill clones in order to extract water from their own bodies, and the campaign was stopped, having done little in the way of bringing the Dorises to heel.

"How much further?" asked Amaryllis.

"A half mile," said Star Doris. "At that point we'll be all the way downtown. That's where the research building you want is." We'd gotten direction from the Blues, but they were kind of crap, and Dorisopolis wasn't very well laid out. "And from there … I'd like to request permission to split off a copy."

"A copy?" I asked. "Why?"

“One to stay with you, one to leave,” said Star Doris. “If it’s dangerous, then I might die, and I don’t want to die. You only need one of me.”

“From your perspective, it gives you a fifty percent chance,” said Amaryllis. “A better person would ask to split off a clone in order to have their essential self perpetuate. But if we let you make a clone, they won’t be going willingly, they’ll want to be the one who goes free. And at some point, we’re going to have to say no to this idiotic idea that we should let you make more of yourself in order to avoid your fate.”

“The question is when it’s proper to stop her,” said Raven.

“We can give her one copy,” I said. “She doesn’t believe in the value of a unique individual continuing on, but I do.” I looked at Star Doris. “Your last clone was when you split before coming in to teach me star magic?” I asked. That clone was now dead: we’d done nothing to stop the Dorises from their barbarism, though we had debated it.

Star Doris nodded.

“And before that?” I asked.

“Copies that have lived?” she asked. “Two, for slave trades, within the last month. I don’t split often. The less star mages, the better.”

“Then you have a month of divergence,” I said, frowning a bit. “I guess I place some value on that, enough to deal with the inconvenience and problems it might bring.”

“We don’t all subscribe to your ideas,” said Grak. I looked over at him, and saw he was frowning. “You pay no attention to the thread of consciousness.”

That threw me for a bit of a loop. “Uh,” I said. “You think that snipping that thread is … wrong?”

He nodded. “It doesn’t matter what I think, I know. But I thought I should let you know, as you are speaking for me.”

“Okay,” I said. That gave me pause. It wasn’t a conversation that I’d ever had with Grak. I immediately wanted to launch into a debate with him, but now was not the time and place. Did he think that going to sleep was evil, because it severed the thread of consciousness? Probably not. I would ask later. “Thank you for the correction, I just …” I trailed off. I hadn’t known. How did he contextualize things like Amaryllis’ clones, or unicorn timelines, or the Lost Year of the revision mages? “Do you suggest something else?”

“No,” he said. “We will protect her. And to honor her request would show charity, even if she is making the request for a stupid reason.”

The streets became clean, not little by little, but all at once. There was some kind of entad at work, because it was unnaturally clean, the filth and grime of human bodies completely eliminated as we walked between one set of buildings and the other. The smells cleared up in

an instant, and the Doris residue, where it had clung to our feet or touched our armor, was instantly wiped away. But this, too, was a mark of the insanity of this place, because the Dorises could freely copy entads, so long as they worked around the twenty-four hour refresh. Given that they maintained a stock of void rifles from what must have been only one or two that had made their way across the border, it didn't seem like anything would have prevented them from spreading the effect across the whole EZ, except that if you had something, and deprived others of it, that was often to your advantage.

My opinion of the Dorises lowered a bit. It felt so good to be in a place that was supernaturally clean, especially after everything that we'd just been through.

"You could shit in your armor here," said Star Doris. "The effect would wipe it away."

"It feels good," said Raven, breathing a little deeper. I waited for someone to make the obvious joke and ask if she'd just shit in her armor, but to my immense disappointment, no one did. I missed Fenn.

"What is it?" asked Amaryllis. "Entad, naturally, but what is it?"

"Like I have any fucking idea?" asked Star Doris. "The higher Blues control them. Some day, one of those bitches is going to make a copy at the wrong time and this whole scheme is going to come tumbling down."

"They're relatively stable though?" asked Amaryllis. "They're the dominant tribe because they were capable of working together?"

"They're well-fed," said Star Doris. "Easier to think when you're not going on a few years straight of eating your own warm flesh. Easier to win an exchange if you're not so worried about losing absolutely everything you have, which is more or less just the stuff on your back. But the ruling class isn't stable, no, there's turnover all the time. It takes too many people to run their schemes, too many slaves, too many managers, and their systems of control only work so well. Besides that, they're too greedy, always pushing things so that those at the bottom are kept just on the knife edge of rebellion. It doesn't take much when any one of us can become an army in a minute or less. Once that happens, it's copies on copies. I've been in one of those, and I don't want to be in another."

"It's probably one of the reasons that they starve you as much as they can," I said. "The more you have to live off your own flesh, the less you eat, which means the weaker you are, which means the easier you are to overpower."

"That's probably what they're thinking, yes," replied Star Doris. She looked at us. "Are we going through the market or diverting around?"

The 'roads' in Dorisopolis weren't very wide, but the one ahead of us was an exception, and it was filled with stalls. Dorises were walking in among those stalls, bartering with Dorises, because Dorisopolis couldn't sustain a currency with how simple it was to counterfeit, and

because Dorises didn't trust enough to trade IOUs or other one-time-use tickets. On the airship ride over, Amaryllis had tried to figure out a monetary scheme that would work when everyone could counterfeit things at will, and she came up with a few, but nothing that was elegant. It would all have been enormously complicated by the fact that it was easy for Dorises to impersonate each other, and that a single Doris could split in two, which you'd have to figure out some way of accounting for in your system of debits and credits.

Instead, it was just trade, items for items. It was pretty much a guarantee that Dorises were only trading away 'fake' goods, those that would melt away to nothing after the twenty-four hour period was up, but that didn't matter all that much, because the actual process of duplication was laborious (create a Doris, kill her, take her stuff, repeat), and barter was a way of getting the things you needed without having to go through the trouble. It made sense that the bodies were piling up as much as they were. I occasionally saw Dorises going off together; there was trade of services as well, as some of the Dorises were specialized.

"We're going through the market," said Amaryllis. "They should be able to see that if we get mobbed, we'll kill them."

"Suit yourself," said Star Doris, and she began moving forward.

The Dorises were stopping what they were doing and staring at us. They moved to the sides to let us pass with a healthy distance between us, but I could see through their eyes, and there were a hell of a lot of eyes in a fifty foot radius around us. For all the cleanliness of this section of Dorisopolis, and the way the Dorises had clean faces and unstained clothes, there was still something wild about them, maybe the way they were all so clearly wearing clothes that were at least partially made from their own bodies, or the hollow look that most of them had. Some of them were slaves, I knew.

Aside from all our armor and the way we bristled with weapons, we were juicy targets. It was imperial policy that no one go into the EZ with unbound entads, specifically because the Dorises could copy them, but looking at us and how many we had, the Dorises might think that we were violating that rule (which we were). Even if we weren't, they might have been thinking that we would make for hostages they could ransom off, either to other Dorises or to the outside world. If we were here, then maybe we had skills that they could use for the low cost of making us into slaves. Rumor was that they didn't often take non-Doris slaves, a response to how hard the hammer had been brought down on them in times past, but that was suspect.

I was on edge, as I'd been since we'd stepped foot into the EZ. The Dorises weren't suicidal, and they had horrible morale, breaking as soon as they thought the tide had shifted, but in theory, they could multiply so fast that they could smother you in bodies.

I knew something was about to go wrong when I was suddenly able to see with a lot more eyes. Somewhere in the buildings above us, there was a Doris multiplying at a very rapid rate, and I could see through her eyes that she had a void rifle.

“Void rifles, above us, seek cover,” I said quickly.

I hadn’t expected it to happen as fast as it did. Almost from the moment it became clear to the Dorises around us that *someone* was going to attack, it was open season. Dorises started multiplying, and they began to crowd in around us. I had my sword drawn in an instant, but the Dorises were pressing up against me, doubling to close the gap rather than really moving. They couldn’t multiply within Grak’s ward, but so many of them were multiplying that it was a press of bodies either way. I felt hands on me, grabbing at me, not trying to hurt me, just trying to take my things from me. The Crown of Eyes was yanked from my head, and the chaotic sensory experience of seeing through the eyes of everyone in a packed crowd ended in an instant.

It was around that time we started being fired on from above. The sound of the void weapons was almost inaudible over the sound of the screaming around us, but I knew where they were, and the distinctive sound of discharge was something I’d been tuning my hearing for. I was very cognizant of the fact that a single lucky shot would be enough to end my life. Not having many other options, I began pushing myself up, trying to get on top of the Dorises around me, away from their grasping hands. With a pang of regret, I switched my armor over to its acid elemental mode. There were screams not long after that, as it began burning away whatever Dorises I was touching. I was tempted to change into an animal to get away, but that would have left my gear behind.

The problem wasn’t the Dorises next to me, it was the others, who were creating ever more clones that were adding to the mass of humanity. They were *literally* trying to drown us in bodies, or at least hoping to weaken us, and the Dorises that were next to us were now trying to escape, but couldn’t because of how much force the crowd was exerting.

All the while, there was still the sound of void rifles firing from above us, and now, mixed in with it, the much louder sound of regular ballistics.

Almost at once, the Dorises that I’d been climbing on disappeared beneath my feet, and I landed back down on the ground, next to the Crown of Eyes, which I snatched up while I turned around to see what the fuck was going on. Before I could figure it out, we were moving, me, Amaryllis, Grak, and Raven, with a lone Doris following us, dragged along, as the others stayed well back. I almost cut her down before realizing that it was Star Doris.

We made it into the mouth of one of the big buildings, leaving the market behind us. The sound of void rifles and gunfire stopped, but there was still screaming from the Dorises, howls of pain and cries of anguish. The press of Dorises had disappeared around us, but at the boundary were those who had been cleanly sliced through, removing hands, arms, legs, and faces. As I listened, the screams were slowly cut off, one by one, and I knew that the healthy Dorises were putting the injured ones out of their misery (not out of empathy, but just to shut them up).

“Good work,” I said to Grak.

“It could have been faster,” said Grak. His hair was mussed, but otherwise he looked fine. “I was trying to figure out how to save this one.”

“Is everyone okay?” asked Amaryllis. “I got scratched, but nothing serious.” Wherever it had been, it was now healed.

“Fine,” said Raven. “Someone was burning bones.” I had forgotten until she said it that she got a bonus from that.

“What was that?” asked Star Doris, looking at Grak.

“A ward,” said Grak.

“Who are you people?” asked Star Doris.

“The Chosen People of the One True God,” said Amaryllis. She watched Star Doris’s face. “That’s not a joke.”

“There,” said Grak. “I’ve put up a shell, six feet from me. If a Doris passes it, they will die. That includes you. Stay with me.”

“That’s impossible,” said Star Doris.

“You can test it, if you’d like,” said Amaryllis. “Tip of your pinky is the traditional method. We have healing on hand.”

“I believe you,” said Star Doris. “But it’s impossible.”

“Just very hard,” said Grak, but he didn’t quite put his heart into it, because some things he could do might literally be impossible for anyone else, same as for me.

“We should get moving,” I said. “There are lots of Dorises around, and we should make a beeline for the star magic facility. It’s not far.”

“I want the copy made now,” said Star Doris, swallowing hard. “If you’re still thinking that you’ll let me.”

“Sure,” I said. “Grak?”

He twitched his mouth. “Now, just one. Don’t leave my radius.”

Star Doris blurred slightly, and another of her appeared. They looked at each other with hostility, but didn’t attack, which I’d worried they might. “Which one?” they asked in unison.

“That one goes,” I said, nodding at the one on my left. “That one stays.”

I really, honestly hadn't thought that she would do it, but the one I had said would stay pulled a knife and made to attack the other, who obviously knew that this was coming. I was faster than her, though, and I laid my hands on both of them, stopping them in place with still magic.

"So what was the plan?" I asked. "You wanted to kill her so that we would let you make a new clone? And I thought you were a slave, where did you get the knife?"

"She picked it up just after the melee," said Amaryllis. "It might have been the only real knife on the block."

I turned to her. "You saw that?"

"I did," she said. "What was she going to do, stab us?"

I cringed. If I really bought into narrative theory, which I didn't, I would have thought that it was a one hundred percent guarantee that Amaryllis would get stabbed by Doris Finch. "Look," I said, turning to the Dorises. "This was a fucking dumb plan. It was one that you hatched knowing that you would have to face down your other self. And if that's the case, then that means you were willing to risk this fuckery because you know something about what we're walking into."

"Or she's just terrible," said Amaryllis.

"Could be," I said. I looked at the two Star Dorises, who I was allowing just enough movement so they could breathe. It was pretty much at the limits of my ability to keep both of them from moving, and they were only ordinary women. "What do you know about what we're going to find, if you ever do take us to the facility?"

"Death," said one Star Doris, the one that had pulled the knife and was destined to come with us. "It's been brewing there for months. They opened a portal to the elemental plane of blood, and found that we could go through it, breaking the exclusion."

"She would say anything not to go," said the other Star Doris. "We've never been there. We don't know anything."

"You're claiming that you can break exclusion through sufficiently powerful star magic?" asked Raven. "If that were possible, we would know."

"It's possible," said the first Doris. "But that's not the problem, the problem is that we sent out hemonauts, lots of them. We had a colony there —"

"All lies," said the other Doris.

"Shut the fuck up," said the first Doris. "That's not going to work."

"You *know* that it's not a ploy," said the other Doris.

“Alright,” I said. “You, no talking.” I amped up the still magic and deprived the denier of her voice. “You were talking about a colony of hemonauts.”

“I don’t know how many, I wasn’t important, and we keep information from ourselves as much as we can. The portal was only big enough for one Doris at a time, with lots of equipment in place, bloodlocks and quarantines. And then a Doris came back different, and the bloodlocks and quarantine were mostly destroyed, leaving the portal open.” She took a breath. I wasn’t letting her move much, but her eyes turned to me, pleading. “It killed hundreds, *thousands* of us, and the Blues kept trying to push more people against it, but that was just making it worse.”

“Is it a threat to the EZ?” asked Amaryllis.

Doris hesitated, then nodded. “Maybe not today, or next week, but eventually what’s in there will venture out.”

“Okay,” I said. “Other one then.” I silenced the first Doris and let the other one talk. “How much of that was lies?”

“We worked there,” she said. “I can draw you a clear map, we’re not far. Other than that, we knew nothing, we were doing low level work, if any of what she said were possible, we wouldn’t have known it.”

“You’re lying,” said Amaryllis.

“How can you tell?” I asked.

“She’s just not that good of a liar,” said Amaryllis. “She was hiding something back at the camp, this is it. I’ll admit telling is easier when you can compare truth and lies side by side. We’ll keep her, let the other go. Give a reward for good behavior, and a punishment for bad.”

“That’s not how she’ll see it,” said Raven. She was sick of the Dorises already, I was pretty sure, not just how they were, but how we were dealing with them.

“Eh, just do it,” I said. “Either way, whichever one we keep, we’ll be doing her a disservice. Neither want to go with us, not that anyone sane would want to.”

“Before we let her go, we should get a location from her,” said Amaryllis. “Thoughts on ways to compel truth before she goes?”

“A single remotely revocable ward should do,” said Grak. It wasn’t something used often, and it was a bit difficult, but a warder could collapse their ward from a distance. We could trap the Doris and then keep her trapped, until we got to the facility. If she lied, she wouldn’t be let out.

I nodded. “Alright,” I said. “Then Star Doris A comes with us, and Star Doris B stays here,” I said. I was still using my hands to hold them in place, but I nodded at them. “If Star Doris B tells

the truth, then Grak drops the ward when we get there. If she doesn't," I hesitated and turned to Grak. "Set duration for … twenty-four hours?"

"It's a bit cruel," he said. "It only needs to be enough to make her obey."

"If the intent is to make her obey, then make it as harsh as possible," said Amaryllis. "That way she won't betray us, and we don't have to worry. It's not cruel if it doesn't come to pass. Why make it into a choice for her, if we're doing coercion?"

"Some might say that using coercion is the problem," said Raven.

"Grak?" I asked. "What do you feel is appropriate?"

"Twelve," he said. "If we're ambushed and killed before we get there, she would suffer punishment for cooperation."

"Sure," I said with a nod. "And she's really got very little reason to lie in the first place."

With that, I let go of Star Doris A, and we put her in position to have a full-body ward. She protested, because she was at risk from the other Dorises, but moving to a secondary location just because she hadn't been able to stop herself from double-crossing us… Well, there were limits to our charity. She told us in detail everything that we wanted to know, the threat of confinement apparently enough.

We set off with Star Doris B, ready to set ourselves against whatever terrible thing had escaped from the elemental plane of blood.