

Shore Leave Part 1

Fun things happen at night; you go out for drinks, meet some new people, get drunk, or get laid. The night also has another fun factor, as that is usually when shit goes down big time. This evening's events take place in the ruins of a burnt out chapel; a chapel composed of tragedy some sixty-four years ago. Though unsuspecting, it carries a bitter secret; a bitter secret soon to rise from the ashes. The chapel was quiet at this time of night, the pigeons were quietly nesting in the decaying rafters, whilst mice ran around the broken pews. It is a quiet harmony.

Said harmony, of course, was shattered in a second when a bright blue portal came into being right in front of the minister's podium. The wildlife scattered like frightened seagulls, scattering dust and ash about in a desperate bid to escape the disturbance. A good plan, due to what was about to come out. The portal rippled like water, the waves growing intense as a being stepped out of it, the portal fading behind him. A pair of sullen yellow eyes scanned the area carefully, but saw nothing out of the ordinary.

The strange fluffy white being grunted loudly to him as he idly kicked away a piece of burnt wood that was resting by his bare feet. This being was, in his own world, called a Dragobax. A unique species, due to his, err, "unique", heritage. And that's to say the least here. He held his arm up as a holographic display formed in front of his face, projected from a purple gem mounted to a gauntlet he wore. Various bits of information and text were rendered in a strange foreign language. "So, what are we dealing with?" he muttered to himself as his wrist-device scanned the dimension. The text flickered about, an image of the planet forming for a brief moment, before the text formed one word: EARTH.

The Dragobax groaned loudly. "Oh, super," he remarked in a gravelly, annoyed tone, "yet another alternate version of Earth. Haven't seen that before after the last forty-one of them; how original" he snarked angrily as the readout started scanning for different factors.

"Hmm, paranoia levels look about the same for most versions of Earth, guess the Illuminati haven't been confirmed in this dimension. Magic levels are higher than average, so there'll be mana aligned individuals in this world. They aren't high enough to be a magic dominate society, so either magic isn't commonplace enough, or the greater population is still in the dark. Best to assume the latter due to the paranoia readouts" the Dragobax muttered to himself as he slowly walked through the rubble. His bare feet kicked up small clouds of dirt and ash around the weathered floors.

“Hmm, computer, open up voice file, begin recording” the Dragobax commanded as a rectangle with a circle appeared on it, a small speaker with three lines appearing alongside it. “This is R.T.A., I have come across another continuity of Earth; this making number forty-two. It doesn’t appear to be much different from other continuities. Magic is present, and paranoia is at an average level. Inhabitants have not been observed as of yet, so I cannot tell if the population is human, anthropomorphic animal people, or some mix of both. Will observe locals when I decide to give a shit about them. Pause recording” the Dragobax reported as two dashes appeared in the rectangular box, and the holo-screen retreated back into the gem, the image of wings replaced by the paired dashes.

Christ this place was a dump. “Christ what a dump” the Dragobax remarked as he leapt over a smile pile of rubble and ruined pews. His claws bumped against one of the pews, a thick wad of ash coating it.

By the looks of the damage, this place was taken down by a fire quite a long time ago, then left to rot. Typical backwards ass planet, can’t even make use of an already existing structure and just leaving it to rot. Typical that this would be a planet with magic then, as clearly they couldn’t put their brain cells together long enough to invent anything practical. He stepped around another pile of burnt out wood, stepping into a column of moonlight. The Dragobax stared skywards at the crescent moon that shone down through the broken portion of the roof. “Hmph, maybe this place isn’t so shit after all” he mused to himself, and then, it happened.

A loud moaning sound echoed throughout the broken building, putting its intruder on high alert... for about three seconds. He couldn’t help but gawk at what he saw: An ethereal grey female, looked to be a dove in a plain white dress. She looked to be about teenage age, and she was floating several feet above the floor, and was wailing loudly. Her feathered hands were cupped to her beak and everything. She continued to wail loudly as she zoomed about, grabbing a hold of some mouldy curtains and shaking them wildly, still making that stupid wailing noise. “The fuck are you doing?” the Dragobax demanded.

The ghostly being wailed softly, her voice slowly going silent as she realized the intruder was looking right at her. “You... you can **see** me?” she gasped in surprise.

“No, I’m actually referring to the *other* ghost flying around- Of COURSE I mean you, dumbshit. What the fuck are you doing?” the Dragobax demanded.

She ghost girl squealed loudly in delight as she zoomed to be right in front of her guest. Her eyes were cold and lifeless, as if there was no one there inside. "Oh my god! I can't believe you can see me!" she continued to squeal like an excited dog.

"I can't believe you're still not answering my god damn question" the Dragobax quipped loudly.

The ghost girl stopped gleeing out. Her cheeks puffed in annoyance. "Rude much?" she remarked.

"Oh yes, because it's rude to *not* answer a question you've been asked twice. But, you know what? Never mind. I've already figured it out" the Dragobax returned in a haughty tone. "You've been scaring off every jackass who comes in here with your gay ghost routine" he guessed.

"Heh, yeah" the ghost girl grinned, oblivious to criticism, at least for that moment.

The Dragobax rolled his eyes in exasperation. At least it made sense why this place was never repaired when idiot ghosts like this dumb bint was haunting it. "Hmph. So, being a ghost, are you bound to this place, or are you free to go wherever you want?" he queried.

"Oh, I can leave whenever I want. I just don't want too" the ghost girl replied lazily, lying on her back in mid-air.

"I take it ghosts of this dimension are bound to the 'unfinished business' rule" the Dragobax assumed.

"Yeah, something like that. By the way, what are you? That man in the black robes said there were magical creatures in this world, but I've never seen a fluffy dragon like you before" she remarked, idly floating around the Dragobax.

"I'm not a dragon, I'm a Dragobax" the Dragobax corrected.

"Never heard of one of those before" the ghost girl remarked whilst she was upside-down.

“I’d be very surprised if you had. I’m not from this world” the Dragobax answered back.

The ghost girl’s eyes lit up in unobtrusive wonder. “Another world? Really? The man in the black robes mentioned something about other worlds, but I thought he was being funny. What’s your world like?” she questioned excitedly.

“That’s classified” the Dragobax informed her.

“Go on” she implored.

“Okay, my world is none of your business, because it isn’t any of your business. Good god, are you dense girl? Well, I suppose you wouldn’t be, considering you don’t have any substance to your character in the first place!” the Dragobax snarled cruelly.

Such cruelty and meanness, was completely lost on the girl. But then, you do have to be alive to be able to take criticism... I think. “What’s your name?” the ghost girl questioned rudely, and off topic again.

“None of your business” the Dragobax answered shortly, looking around in fear of another ghost popping out of the woodwork.

“I’m Delilah” Delilah explained, somehow showing pride with her name.

“That’s freaking super” the Dragobax remarked dryly, not even looking at her.

“Go on, what’s yours?” the ghost girl pressured him.

An irritated growl rumbled within the Dragobax’s throat. “If it’ll shut you up, it’s Rex” Rex answered out of frustration.

“That’s a nice name Rex” Delilah praised.

“I didn’t ask for your opinion” Rex snapped.

“But I gave it anyways” Delilah sniped with a cheeky grin. “Still, being a dragon, I wonder how the Weirdness Censor will deal with that” she wondered aloud.

Rex raised a questioning brow, ignoring her obfuscating stupidity on his own race. “Weirdness Censor?” he questioned incredulously.

“Yeah, don’t you have one in your world? Cuz, judging by your outfit you should; reality itself wouldn’t want the population to have to suffer your sense of fashion” Delilah quipped with a sly grin.

Rex growled audibly, his lower jaw tightening in annoyance. Delilah snickered to herself, knowing he couldn’t take his frustration out on her. “But, if you don’t know, then I’ll be nice and tell you what the man in black robes told me. Because that’s what I do: I tell people things they want to know, I’m a nice person” Delilah gloated, how very unlike a nice person.

“Get on with it!” Rex snapped whilst subtly tapping his gem, re-activating the recording program.

“Okay okay, geez. See, the man in the black robe said that the Weirdness Censor, or, the official thing was the Scepticism Barrier, I think, is a special sort of enchantment in our world. It applies to anything really out of the ordinary, which is pretty much the existence of magic. He said every ordinary person has a Weirdness Censor, which prevents them from being able to accept the concepts of the bizarre, like magic. With it they achieve the mental footwork needed to find a rational explanation for things. It also applies to magical beings, like dragons and unicorns and other stuff. As far as people know, things like dragons don’t actually exist. So, because dragons can’t exist, they mentally censor every dragon ever, seeing them as ordinary lizards instead” Delilah explained, somehow having a pair of glasses perched on the bridge of her beak.

Rex rubbed his chin thoughtfully, his claw gently sliding down the horn jutting out of his chin. “Hmm, that’s actually almost interesting. A magical world usually has pretty high levels of paranoia, but because they mentally censor magic itself, they go about everything completely oblivious” he surmised thoughtfully.

“Yep, I was kinda amazed too. To think before all this I was a happy girl living her life, then, boom, see-through and floaty. Ghosts can see everything as they are because they’re dead, and are part of the weird stuff. Though the man in the black robes mentioned that once someone actually knows magic is real by witnessing it and remembering it, their Weirdness Censor breaks hard. So you gotta be careful around the ordinary people,” Delilah added off-handedly.

“Then why do you insist on scaring the piss out of any person who comes in here?” Rex questioned. “Aren’t you risking the reveal of the magical world?”

“Nope. It’s because they come up with a rational reason for what happened. Most of them blame the wind. I’m actually pretty glad you came in. You’re the first magic user I’ve ever seen” Delilah remarked.

“I wonder why that is” Rex muttered under his breath. “So I take it normal people can’t see ghosts then, even if they wanted too?” he inquired.

“Yeppers. The man in the black robe told me-”

“Before you go on; this man in the black robe, did you meet him after you died?” Rex cut in.

“Yeah, I did. How did you know that?” Delilah questioned in amazement.

Rex shook his head in sheer exasperation; how did she not even...? “Because you spoke with Death, or at least, an avatar of the concept anyways” Rex explained.

Delilah’s eyes fluttered, as if looking back on her memories. “Oooohhhh” she said aloud. “Oooohhh yeah, he told me he was Death. Black robe, scythe, skeleton, big shiny red nose. Huh, how did I forget that?” Delilah laughed.

Rex kept his mouth shut on that one, this dumb broad was already pretty distracted, and he didn’t need to add to it. Granted... shiny red nose? What? “Well, Mr. Death told me that

normal people don't have the ability to see ghosts, even if they wanted too. He said only magic users, other ghosts, feral cats, and the blind could see ghosts" Delilah recounted.

"The blind?" Rex questioned, sceptical of that assertion.

"He said it was funny because it's ironic. He made lots of jokes actually. I never really thought there was a Death, but you'd think he'd at least be polite and sombre, like he was a noble or something. Hmm, to think it's been sixty-four years since I saw him" Delilah said sadly.

"You've been haunting a ruined, what is this? A chapel? You've been haunting this dump for sixty-four years? No wonder you wouldn't have seen any magical people. Only dumb kids who get dared to come to places like this" Rex scoffed loudly.

"I didn't say it was the perfect plan" Delilah hissed sullenly.

"Whatever. So, how did you become a ghost then?" Rex questioned, not exactly interested in the answer, but he might as well get some useful information out of her.

"Oh, well, there was a fire. One of the candles fell onto the carpet and set it alight. It was extra flammable due to all the wine that had been spilled on it over the years. I was in Sunday school when it happened. Everyone else fled quickly, but I panicked... for some... reason.... When I ran out, a roof beam came loose and hit me on the head, killing me in an instant and pinning my corpse to the ground. It's somewhere around here actually, but it's probably pretty ashy and bony by now. That's when Mr. Death came for me. He said ghosts are created due to particularly violent or sudden deaths. And we exist because we have last regrets we need to fulfil before we can move on to the afterlife. He told me I had only one regret, but... I can't remember it. The beam hit me so hard I have post-mortem amnesia" Delilah explained.

"That... that makes no sense. How does post-mortem amnesia even occur when you're dead?" Rex questioned sceptically.

Delilah shrugged absently. "I dunno, it just happened. I've been flying around trying to remember my last regret, but I have no idea what I had to regret in the first place" she sighed.

“Being born would be a start” Rex hissed under his breath. “I take it he didn’t offer any clues?”

“Umm, well, after I cried for a bit, he told me what I was looking for would be in the last place I’d look. So, I think what I need is here in this chapel, but I can’t remember what I’m looking for” Delilah sighed, her appearance flickering randomly.

“I see, well good luck with that” Rex said shortly, stepping past the rubble towards the crumbling front doors as he froze his recording again.

“Wait, where are you going?” Delilah demanded, floating after Rex.

The Dragobax ignored her, deftly leaping over another pile of rubble, and landing perfectly near the front door. They must’ve been something worthwhile back in the day, like you could almost believe god was real and that this was his house. Too bad now they’re just ugly pieces of semi-rotten wood. “Where are you going?” Delilah repeated.

The Dragobax rolled his head around flippantly, a cruel smile on his maw. “Out the front door” he answered soullessly.

Delilah’s beak hung open. How could someone be so cold? “What?! After I just told you all that?! You’re just going to leave me here?” she squawked, her arms flapping aimlessly in the air.

“Yep” Rex answered with an almost too-happy smile. “Your problems are your own, they ain’t got nothin’ to do with me. So, I’d say see ya, but I really don’t want to see you again. So, yeah, eat shit” he added, callously flipping her the bird as his other hand reached for the door.

“You’re horrible” Delilah uttered in disgust.

“Yes I am. I even got a medal for being horrible, I don’t have it with me, but I assure you it’s quite real” Rex quipped sarcastically as he heaved with all his might against the door.

“You can’t just leave me here” Delilah protested loudly.

Rex heaved against the door again, scattering small drops of debris everywhere, and then, he paused. He stood there for quite a while until he finally decided to flip his head around, a smug smile on his maw. “And I can’t leave you... because?” he chuckled.

“Because! Because I’ll... I’ll... I’ll haunt you!” Delilah decided with a loud squawk.

Rex’s ears drooped at that very idea. Was this broad actually serious? “Yeah” Delilah boasted, now much more confident. “I’ll haunt your sorry butt. You’ll never get rid of me. And when you try to leave for another world, I’ll just follow you. And continue to haunt you forever. Trying to sleep? I’ll scream in your ears every hour. Trying to shower? I’ll peep on you. Trying to hit on girls? I’ll make it really awkward for you” she threatened.

Rex would be aghast at this point, but he was far too annoyed at the fact that he knew full well she would hold true to her threat, and he couldn’t do a thing about it. She had him by the balls and she fucking knew it. That very idea alone pissed him off. “Are you fucking serious?” he demanded.

“Dead serious” Delilah answered, ignoring her own unintended pun.

Rex seethed quietly. He wasn’t going to give her the satisfaction of knowing she had gotten to him. “Fine” he barked in annoyance. “Fine, I’ll help you find peace or whatever dumb shit you need just so I don’t have to deal with you anymore. So, first thing, what do you even remember about your life that would make your regret, unless you forgot your past life by your oh-so-convenient bout of amnesia” he snapped.

“Well, I remember my group were in the colourful room where we have our Sunday school talks. But then people started shouting so the nice Sister who taught us about god came out for a few seconds, then she screamed for us to run. A fire had started in the main chapel. So we all ran, but.... For, some reason... I turned around and went back. Everyone called out for me. I ran past the fire, but it had gotten to the roof. A beam crashed on me and killed me. I think, what I’m missing is in that room. But, I don’t know for sure. I can’t move the stuff in there” Delilah said in a strained voice, trying her best to remember.

“You moved the curtains” Rex pointed out. “Why couldn’t you move some rubble?” he questioned.

“Because I can only move light stuff. Ghosts can have some effect on the physical world, but not much. I can’t move the rubble in the colourful room” she protested, trying not to make this sound like a plot hole. Which is isn’t, obviously. I don’t know why you’re accusing me of making one. So stop accusing me.

“Well, ain’t that con-fucking-venient” Rex quipped in southern drawl, subtly rolling his eyes.

Bypassing all that rubble would be a complete waste of time and energy. As if this obnoxious little meeting wasn’t *already* a complete waste of time and energy. So it would be a waste of time and energy squared. And Rex don’t got time for shit like that. Drawing from his wrist device, a small package appeared out of it. It unfolded itself at a staggeringly fast rate, until, it fully folded out into a shoulder-mounted rocket launcher. “What is tha-!!!” Delilah tried to question, but was short-changed by the answer.

A rocket flew clean out of the barrel, and straight into the pile of debris. In a split second, there was no more debris, just a nice blackened crater of wood. All that was debris had either been obliterated, or was blown away with such force that they shattered on the still solid stone walls. The device neatly folded back down into its compressed state and was re-absorbed by the wrist device. “Just one of my toys” Rex answered, downplaying the fact that he just fired a rocket.

He neatly sauntered past the ruined debris, with Delilah following, completely slack-jawed at such a callous disregard for, well, everything. Rex paused by the altar, staring intermittently at the two doors. The one on the left still had its door, but it looked to be close to disintegrating at this point. So many holes had been eaten through it. The doorway on the right had no door, but it was close to collapsing. “Colourful room on the right, right?” he questioned the ghost. Delilah nodded, her beak still wrenched open.

Rex nodded in confirmation as he idly stepped over some more broken wood, and ducked under the collapsing frame, his horns grazing against the wood as he entered the ruined room. A chalkboard was half-hanging on the wall, its left support having given up long ago as the right desperately tried to keep it on the wall. It was completely black, and was most likely completely useless. The only other thing that even looked remotely like an object was a burned and completely ruined short table. Everything else was complete trash. “Man, this

room is even more of a dump. You sure what you're looking for wasn't completely trashed?" Rex questioned.

"Yes" Delilah answered slowly. She seemed very uncomfortable to be in the room. Wait, it wasn't really, discomfort, that she was displaying. It seemed a lot more like... anxiety. She seemed incredibly anxious right now, and, who wouldn't be? Perhaps your only chance to finally pass on, and it rested on the shoulders of someone she was threatening. Who wouldn't be nervous? "Please, please just look. What I'm after is somewhere in the rubble. I'll... I'll know it when I see it. Please, just find it" she begged, her hands folded in prayer.

Now, Rex might be a complete hard-ass with a heart made of cold, unfeeling obsidian. But even he was completely unmoved by her almost tearful begging. There was no love lost here, considering she had threatened him and all. So if she even thinks being all sad and woe-is-me would be able to move him, she'd be wrong. Dead wrong. This was just a job, and he was going to see it to the end only because the payment was actually worth it.

But where to start? He wanted to blast apart the rubble, but that would risk destroying whatever it was the girl was after. What could she even want? He highly doubted a girl her age would care about much, especially not enough to become a ghost. So, was it jewellery? She seemed the age to be that vain after all. Ugh, this was going to be a waste of an evening if that. Sighing in frustration, metal started to fold out from his wristband and over his fists. The strange metal gloves decompressed quickly, becoming a pair of clawed gauntlets.

Digging into the charred wooden hunks, he carelessly tossed them at the wall, impacting and smashing the chalkboard. The work was relatively simple enough, and pretty soon he had carved out a small clear area as he worked his way around the table. He even hocked a piece at Delilah, who flew out of the way despite the fact that it wouldn't have even hit her. "Watch it" she snapped angrily, despite having no reason to be angry.

Rex laughed at her expense as he kept excavating. The rubble thankfully wasn't load-bearing at all, so it was easy disposing of it. As he shovelled through the mess, a question floated back to the front of his mind again. "Say, do you have things called "humans" in this world?" he questioned as he hurled away more ruined wood.

Delilah's expression was confused. Clearly they weren't a thing, or they might have gone by something else. "No, never heard of those. What do they look like?" she queried.

“Umm, pink fleshy creatures with various levels of body hair, mostly on their head and chest” Rex explained as best as he could.

“That sounds like Pigs. We have plenty of those. Are they called humans in your world?” Delilah asked.

“No, Pigs are Pigs. Humans also have big ears and noses, and they tend to be obnoxiously loud and unpleasant. They also kinda smell” Rex pressed, still trying to find the best way to explain this.

“That still sounds like you’re describing Pigs” Delilah pointed out.

“Obviously not then” Rex grunted as he returned back to excavating.

That is, until he came to his first challenge: A large boulder that looked to be a part of the ceiling. Rex looked upwards to confirm that, yes, it was from the ceiling, as evidenced by the enormous hole in the roof. Gripping deeply, the machinery of his metal gloves whirred loudly as he hefted up the enormous rock. His back was arched way back now, and he was finding it difficult to keep his balance. So with one callous throw he hurled it forwards, smashing through the wall and shattering it completely.

The entire structure groaned loudly, debris rained down from the roof. Rex was prepared to leg it out of there. But, to his relief the building settled. He sighed quietly. “AHHHHH!!!” Delilah shrieked into his ear, somehow already by his side.

His fur was on ends as she breezed through him, her eyes tearing up as she looked into the space Rex had just cleared. He scowled in annoyance as he followed where she was looking, to find a small charred something on the ground. He carefully picked it up, and found the object to be a doll. “Mary Magdalene!” Delilah sniffed, barely able to hold her tears back.

Mary Magdalene? Wasn’t she a whore from eons ago? “This is what was stopping you from passing on?” Rex spat angrily. “A fucking doll?!” he yelled, shaking Mary violently in front of Delilah’s face.

“She was my favourite” Delilah uttered as her ghostly hands reached towards Mary, and removed a ghost of the doll.

The ghost girl hugged the doll tightly, until a strange feeling overtook her, she gasped loudly. Delilah’s body exuded such a brilliant radiance that Rex had to avert his eyes from it. When it faded, Rex found not a teenage girl, but a child who looked to be about five years old floating in front of him. She was wearing a pretty yellow Sunday dress adorned with lace, and had a ribbon tied to the back of her head. Her plumage was a brilliant white, and her blues eyes were like sapphires. Mary was also looking as good as new as well. “Thank you” Delilah said sweetly, hugging her doll tightly.

“What the hell?” Rex gasped.

“I remember everything now” Delilah explained, her baby blue eyes twinkling gently. “I died because I had forgotten Mary, and went back to get her. But I died before I could. I couldn’t pass on because I was still worried about Mary; I refused to pass on without her. But you found her mister. You found Mary for me. Thank you. Thank you thank you thank you” she repeated gleefully as a column of light formed around her.

Delilah sighed in relief as brilliant white wings grew from her back, they flapped idly as a halo formed around her head. Delilah looked skywards, a content smile on her face. “Thank you mister, I’ll never forget you” she declared as her ghostly form vanished in the column of light, finally at rest.

Rex stared blankly at where Delilah had been, and then to the doll in his hands. He stared at the barely visible smile on Mary’s face, and he dropped the ratty thing in disgust. “Well, this has been a big waste of fucking time. Let’s go see if this version of Earth has something I could actually get drunk on” he declared to himself, completely and utterly disregarding what had just happened in the past twenty minutes.