

Dean – Uplifted Hyena

STAT	VALUE	COST
STR	5	5
COOR	9	6
AGI	9	8
END	7	7
CHA	9	9
	TOTAL	35

IQ	100	140 IQ
RANK	10	POVERTY STRICKEN
PSI	40	1 PSI

Learned Skills (No School)

- +2 Drugs
- +1 Convince
- +1 Goad
- +2 Streetwise

Mother's Milk

- +1 Unarmed
- +1 Programming
- +1 Sneak

Description: Uplifted spotted hyena. Approximately 45 Kg. Stands erect 5' 7". Standard posture is semi-degenerate.

Distinguishing Marks: Spot pattern.

Gear:

- Neo-leather ships jacket
- Cigarettes
- Flick-blade knife

*I'm climbing the spiral—the top of the stair
Riding the helix—Omega's last heir
Go ahead, say you know me—think you'll know what I say
Generations. Revolutions. Every dog has its day.*

*I've watched your eyes smile
You're so pleased with your gift.
Well I'm very grateful Jack.
And I'm here to give it back.*

Title: Big Mistake

Album: DogStar

Artist: Sarin Arkin-32 [Uplifted Wolf, Allez-OOP Media-Conglomerate Megastar]

It's possible to get “knocked down” in zero-spin if you get hit just right—and Mother hit me just right. I lay against the metal floor of the Dark with bright spirals of light shooting through my vision and a blood-rush of pain from the side of my face.

“*We do not steal.*” Mother (not my biological sire, of course—the pack matron) had said with a faint hiss. “*We are better than that.*” Then she took the three Nexadrine tubes I'd brought back instead of a bag of junk that was the mainstay of the pack business and turned to go stow it with the rest of the bounty judged to be worthy of resale. She might think herself above theft or the real black market—but she wasn't about to discard the pharmaceuticals either. They were probably worth more than all of Second Watch's haul for that day combined. She looked back “*And clean yourself up for dinner.*” That meant she wasn't done with me yet.

“You better stop nicking off Mother,” Shenzi said, wrapping her sarong around herself. We all had full coats of fur but Mother insisted on regular clothing anyway. Especially at dinner. “She's going to hurt you.” There was more admonishment than sympathy in her voice and I forced my hand down from the side of my face.

“She won't,” I said trying to keep a snarl out of my voice. “She'd have to pay for the repairs and she'll never part willingly with a medi-fee.”

Shenzi put her hands on her hips and dipped her muzzle so I was looking into her eyes. “If it comes to making an example of you, Dean, she'll lay you out and let you heal slow. Don't think she won't and ... honestly ... I think you might learn something from it.”

“Thanks, sis. Always looking out for me.”

Smoking on an orbital is always dicey. The Oxy-Techs *really* don't like it. I told myself the habit was one I *wanted*—after all, it was just about certain to force me to leave some day, wasn't it? My paw-hand brushed the pocket of my jacket—a single piece of scavenged junk I'd actually been happy to collect. It was a ship's jacket, name of *Lambert Transform*—a deep space trade vessel the register had said. I couldn't imagine why anyone would have thrown something as nice as it out—but they had—and I'd been

reluctantly haunting one of the dry-waste disposal chutes when it'd come down. It had interior belts for tools. It could be heat transparent or opaque when it wanted to be—and even with a fur coat places on an orbital can get *cold*. And it had pockets for cigarettes.

The dining table was an oval metal piece of magnetized hull plating taken off a ghost ship one of the deep-tugs had hauled into dock. In the spin-less warrens of Alkali the food chams' metal bottoms held to it without requiring expensive power. I've never gone over it with a Geiger counter. I don't want to know.

Before the meal we all sat silently while Mother waited. Or meditated. Or said some private prayer. Or something. But it was a very big deal that we waited until she was ready for us to eat. It had to do with being "*better*." It had to do with being civilized. Civilized people wait before eating. Civilized people use cutters and tri-spears. Civilized people can't chew through carbon steel with their natural teeth. Civilized people can't smell trouble coming—or hear the sound of metal-fatigue in the upper vent brachials. Civilized people don't sleep sprawled across each other like a breathing carpet of fur as First Watch was right now (Mother always had a third of the pack sleeping and a third working—heavens knows what'd happen if everyone came home at once).

Civilized people wait to eat.

So we waited.

And she looked at me. And I was far enough out of arms reach that I *really* had to stop from snarling. Maybe you can imagine what Mother thought of *that* little habit?

"Dean," she said, "you're one of the brightest pups. You could put Second Watch in front if you abided." My eyes narrowed as I realized she wasn't going to count the profits from the Nexadrine. Great. I could hear hisses of disapproval around me. Saying I was brighter than my mates and letting them down at the same time. Just great, mom. Wonderful.

"You have a sharp mind, Dean, but you're rejecting your *potential*. You've been given a body that can walk aright. You have a throat that can speak. You still want to lurk in the dim-shafts like a predator. You want to walk away from a gift of heritage that by rejecting you don't deserve. But it isn't just you Dean. When you prowl and buy (she meant the drugs) and lurk and *bite* you're not just walking away from the dream. You take the whole pack with you. You make us all feral in their eyes. All of us. Feral."

So that was that—and then she lifted a carni-stick to her lips and there was the sound of plastic ripping and aquatubes being squirted down throats and soft snarls and lapping noises and the sounds of lips smacking and teeth closing. We might be *better*. We still ate like dogs.

And that's it. What? You thought this was going somewhere? Well, it kinda was. I got up and I slunk to the door—and that was it—I headed *out*. Planetside there's up and down—on the station, you realize those are *illusions*. There's only one real direction: out. Even

towards the center of the station is still *out* in the big picture. And there's a lot of *out* out there. Look out the window: billions of cubic hexameters of *out*. Trillions of miles of *out*—numbers so big our brains just shunt them into approximations of scale we can say—but like an unbeliever in church, we can't *understand*.

So here I am: on the Dark. Surrounded by a billion black miles of silent *out*.

You'd think it'd be easier to leave.

-Dean