



[breathe. remember lead, don't manage!]

It's been a hell of a year. Let me be the first to congratulate you all on a job well done. We have conquered Luxembourg. It will be a fine base of operations. My friends, this 400-bedroom converted legislative palace was hard earned with cunning, brawn, and deathrays, and we are gathered around this giant block of polished granite at the dawn of a New Era. In just one year this rag-tag bunch of dreamers, connected only by shared delusions of unspeakable power and a mutual friendship with me, has managed great things. I'm proud of each and every one of you. In a very real way, this syndicate of evil is like family to me. [emote]

Stage One went off almost without a hitch, under the cover of an economic crisis, which was tailor-made for the purpose of distraction. Of course that wouldn't have been possible without you Raging Bear, flexing your mighty mutant manipulation of the securitized mortgage market, your adorable herd of ill-tempered zebras in tow at all times. Sure, you can't take him anywhere, but we'd all be back to working tirelessly in solitude on our various jewel heists and doomsday devices if it weren't for him. Let's give R.B. a hand everybody. [applause]

And while we're thanking those among us who really came up big this year, let's talk about Professor Meteor. The Professor's satellite-coordinated air strikes on the day of the Luxembourg Parliamentary Summer Party proved to be a rallying cry for the invasion of a landlocked country most of us still can't even point to on a map. [pause for laughter] I for one will never forget the feeling of triumph that June evening, watching through my macro-binoculars as lightning and fire engulfed a pitifully-shielded white vinyl outdoor party tent. Those fools drank Chablis and chatted around the waffle station, completely unaware of the hovering zeppelin terror above them right until the very moment of their doom. Indeed it was good to crush our enemies, see them driven before us, and to hear the lamentation of their catering staff. [wait for hand-wringing and diabolical laughter to subside]

The reality today, of the world laid at our feet, seemed so distant during those awkward few meetings at the beginning of 2008, when first we sat in the Brainstorming Circle at Countess Mom's Fortress of Passive-Aggressivity. I do have to say I'm glad there aren't too many photographs of training camp. Surely I'm not the only one who was embarrassed by how tough it is to aim the Dwarf-a-Pult! And there might not be photographic evidence, but who could ever forget how our sparring sessions showcased the profound impotence of John "The Evaporator" Davis in the face of Pietr "Mr. Steam" Stemanopoulos? [see if The Evaporator laughs along, if not pull lever to activate Destructo-Chair]

While I have your attention, and before we tuck in to our delicious pheasant-stuffed lobsters tonight, how about a round of applause for the henchmen and henchwomen who did such a great job putting together what looks like a delicious feast. [applause] We couldn't do it without our henchpeople, and there will soon be more opportunity for celebration and general henching, because 2009 will be the year we show the world exactly what it is that we want to show them! [applause] Of course we could do it without them, but when you're wielding unspeakable power, who has time to wash and dry a load of spandex, change the bulbs in the fusion chamber console, and drag knockout-gassed secret agents back to the lair? Once more for the henchpeople, ladies and gentlemen! [applause]

Finally, I would like everyone to take a moment to remember our fallen brothers and sisters who aren't here around the table tonight. The brave men and diabolical women who dreamed our evil dream, fought our evil fight, and died with evil honour. Their places are set, but their seats are empty. You'll have to fight for the extra desserts! [pause for laughter] Not that you need another, Gigantor. [pause for laughter; keep hand on Destructo-Chair lever]

And with that, I propose a toast:

May the New Year bring us love and happiness, along with an instant vaporizing death for all who dare oppose us. [glower menacingly]