

RQG – 70 – Quoth the Raven

Content Warnings

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BEN

Hi everyone, Ben here. I'd just like to take a moment to thank some of our patrons. Joy Lin Dean, Cam B, Jackie C, Stephanie Henricks-Welsh, Rye, Natasha Herbert. Thank you all. We really appreciate your support. If you'd like to join them, go to www.patreon.com/rustyquill and take a look at our rewards.

[Show Theme - Intro]

ALEX

Hello and welcome to episode 70 of the Rusty Quill Gaming podcast. I'm your host and GM Alex Newall and with me today, I have

BEN

Ben Meredith

LYDIA

Lydia Nicholas

Rusty Quill Gaming – 70 – Quoth the Raven

BRYN

Bryn Monroe

JAMES

James Ross

ALEX

And who are you playing?

BEN

Grizzop drik acht Amsterdam

LYDIA

Sasha Racket

BRYN

Hamid Saleh Haroun al-Tahan

JAMES

Sir Bertrand Macguffingham

ALEX

Getting there. Getting there. I'll get you lickety split eventually. It helps that I don't have to play a character because then I'd mess it up.

JAMES

Naming am hard

ALEX

Naming am hard.

JAMES

And he fell over

ALEX

Speaking of am falling over, we have now a pair of mages in tow that which we're going to have to deal with

JAMES

Spare mages

ALEX

I left you without Brutor for, what, a few sessions and suddenly now it's just a...

JAMES

Bertie's got a new pet

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LYDIA

Do you teach the people how to be dogs?

JAMES

Yes!

ALEX

Stop jumping the gun!

BEN

I've got this collar for you, now take your clothes off and put it on

(laughing)

ALEX

So weird. So we are currently in Prague...

LYDIA

I'm guessing that the...

ALEX

So having been around the brief zombie outbreak of Prague at ground level you headed up to the University of Prague, Charles University, floating up in the sky and you are now mostly together again in the study of Franz Kafka with

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Einstein, who is basically a teenage girl it would appear and...certainly that was your comment last time.

BEN

Well he just keeps going – urhhh

ALEX

And you have discovered a secret room in the study of Franz Kafka and Bertie was just rejoicing the group having grievously wounded one Oliver and pushing another Oliver to a psychological...

BRYN

No, no, no, they're back in the entry hall. We haven't brought them all the way down to the professorial rooms.

JAMES

Also they wounded each other. That's what they did. Bertie just gave them the tools

(laughing)

ALEX

Stop facilitating misery

JAMES

Bertie just left the toddler there with a book of matches. He bears no responsibility for what happened afterwards when he left that toddler next to a bucket of oily rags. It's fine.

ALEX

And on that note we will pick up then. Bertie is re-joining Grizzop and Sasha with Einstein in Kafka's study – that's a lot of names – and Bertie is with Oliver and Oliver

LYDIA

No Hamid is with Oliver and Oliver. Why don't we all just get named Oliver. That would be...

ALEX

Hamid is with Oliver and Oliver looking after Oliver whilst caring for Oliver. So we will start with...

JAMES

Oliver, Oliver, Oliver, Oliver, Oliver.

ALEX

Stop it. It's going to stop meaning things to me. In Kafka's study – you are able to open the door if you wish having just unlocked it

LYDIA

Check it for traps

ALEX

Einstein is stomping over – well what’s in there? Come on open the door for goodness sake.

LYDIA

I’m just checking it for traps. Check it for traps again

JAMES

I say this wallpaper is ghastly – and Bertie emerges.

BEN

Hello Bar...er Bertie.

ALEX

There are no tutorials today. Go away!

BEN

Oh he’s with us.

ALEX

Who are you?

BEN

Helping.

ALEX

Alright, ok. Is the door open or not?

Give me disable device

LYDIA

Ooh critical fail.

BEN

Ah that's really unhelpful. Plot relevant dice rolls.

ALEX

Let me just bring this up. There are no traps, the door is open, there is a room beyond it with no traps. A room.

LYDIA

Right so what's in the room?

ALEX

So it appears to be a wizard's workshop however it doesn't appear to be particularly evil. By which I mean there's no screaming peasants held in cages over a burning flame pit

JAMES

They seem fine

ALEX

They're really happy!

(laughing)

JAMES

The peasants are warm

LYDIA

Really middle class chaps in cages over toasty...

BRYN

But there's just a little card with their safe word printed on it

(laughing)

ALEX

So what is in there is actually a very straightforward workshop insofar there is what looks to be a basic alchemical set and mostly it's a lot of paperwork stuck to walls and things. None of it is written in human blood. None of it is big, huge archaic.

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BRYN

Are there any green bubbling liquids?

ALEX

There is a green bubbling liquid

BRYN

There's *always* a green bubbling liquid

ALEX

It bubbles despite there being no heat however it also is quite small and seems to be just what it does. It's not particularly exciting.

BEN

So it's purely decoration.

BRYN

If I can have one of those. It's like a lava lamp but better.

ALEX

What do you mean like? It is a lava lamp in this world. You're fine.

BRYN

Awesome.

ALEX

There is a cage with a crow on the side which is up against a wall and basically it is different from the chintzy study in that it seems quite straightforward. Like a functional workshop but it doesn't appear particularly evil at first glance.

JAMES

Bertie is going to talk to the crow because...

ALEX

Of course.

JAMES

...Bertie knows that crows are quite intelligent. They can use simple tools which as far as he's concerned puts them on par with the working class so he's going to go over....

(laughing)

ALEX

I'm not going to engage with that, carry on.

JAMES

No you're right not to. Bertie is a horrible person.

ALEX

Indeed and you don't fuel that fire. So...

JAMES

Mr Crow

ALEX

[crow noises]

JAMES

Bertie takes out some of the rations that he's got and offers a little bit to the crow with his palm flat of course because he's got a very high handle animal skill.

ALEX

Now I'm going to have to describe this look because I can do this look but of course there are no listeners. What you get is...which is best described for listeners who are familiar with it – what you talking about Bertie? It's just a sidelong glance with a maybe.

JAMES

Can Bertie make a roll for handle animal at this point?

ALEX

I will return to this. Albert Einstein meanwhile has pushed his way into the room and is staring to have a wander through and is starting to look through things with a huff and a gruff.

BEN

Hang on, was Einstein part of the bit council of wizards

ALEX

Yes

BEN

Right so he...

ALEX

Yes. He just didn't really pay attention to you ever.

BEN

Hang on a minute.

ALEX

What?

BEN

You

ALEX

Yes?

BEN

You were lying to me before

ALEX

What?

BEN

Well I mean I'm supposed to be looking for the rogue wizard right?

ALEX

Well yes, sure, why not.

BEN

Well it turns out it's Kafka which I found from somewhere else.

ALEX

Yes I know that's why we're here.

BEN

Yes but you didn't tell me that in the first place. Why would you lie to me?

ALEX

Well I don't know. Does it make a difference?

BEN

Well it wasted my time.

ALEX

Well that's your time. You should've picked better questions, I don't know.

He's just wandering around, digging through drawers and stuff.

BEN

No hang on a minute...

JAMES

Such a GM's answer.

(laughing)

BEN

Hang on a minute. No look, why were you lying to me? What's going on here?

ALEX

Right, ok, fine, fine. Big poufy chair appears. It has far too many pillows and a basic stool appears for Grizzop. It's the right size. It has a back to it. There are worse stools I suppose.

BEN

Alright

ALEX

Right, fine, so it's Kafka yes.

BEN

Well yeah

ALEX

So we are here to investigate Kafka yes.

BEN

Yes

ALEX

So we're all in the same room looking for the same man and it makes no difference whether you were here earlier or not.

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BEN

No...I...*why* did you all lie to me?

ALEX

I didn't lie at all.

BEN

You didn't tell me it was Kafka

LYDIA

It makes quite a difference. He just keeps releasing zombies down there and there's quite a few people dead.

ALEX

Oh that's quite bad.

LYDIA

Yeah

ALEX

He then just gets up and claps the chairs away while you're still sat on it and then proceeds to just keep digging. It's like, yes, you raised a legitimate question, I'm going to search the room now and he just continues to do so.

BEN

Wizards.

ALEX

Cut to, not really a wizard, Hamid. You're with Oliver and you are with Oliver.

BRYN

I'm going to make a diplomacy check to reassure the Olivers.

ALEX

That seems wise.

BRYN

Natural 20

ALEX

So what you managed to do is convince Oliver who had the bloody nose to calm down.

BRYN

I've given him a hanky to help with the bleeding.

ALEX

Of course you have. Sure, that's fine. Hankies of course, the solution to everything. And Oliver who was injured, you've managed to talk and convince

and calm down in such a way that he's now calming other Oliver, being it's fine, it's fine, I'm not hurt, it's ok.

BRYN

Look Oliver we both know that much worse things happen every day at this university. People do not get expelled for minor accidents like this one. You'd have to something much worse than...anyway. The point is that if you look after him, if you make sure he's ok. If you take him to the medical building, they'll patch him up and as long as they've seen that you did it by accident, that you looked after him and made sure he was ok there won't be any major negative consequences. You're both gonna be fine. In fact why don't you do that now.

ALEX

Both Olivers look at you, nod.

BRYN

Head over to the medical building, look after each other.

ALEX

Both nod, proceed to help one another up and because you didn't clue which Oliver needed to support and help the other, they both mutually support one another out towards the hospital wing whilst comforting one another for different problems

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BRYN

Aw. I hope those two crazy kids make it work

(laughing)

I head back to the study.

JAMES

Can I just say I'm enjoying the fact that their medical building for a university based in the sky is described as a hospital wing

(laughing)

ALEX

Canon

JAMES

Yeah, yeah

ALEX

I'm not even...that's fine.

JAMES

Just made of wafty angel wings.

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ALEX

Bertie you were talking to a crow right?

JAMES

Yes

ALEX

The crow has succeeded in taking a small amount of food. Give me a handle animal.

JAMES

Ok. Before I do this handle animal roll, Bertie would check is there a name plate or anything like that on the cage

ALEX

Nope.

JAMES

No other clues as to the identity of the crow.

ALEX

Nope

JAMES

Bertie is not doing a perception check for crow related ancillary items. 17

ALEX

You find...

BRYN

I don't remember seeing that one in the rule book.

ALEX

You find some crow related ancillary items. You find a perch. You find a feed bowl. You find, what appears to be, some fresh newspaper ready to be put underneath the cage. I can go on.

JAMES

Is there a little fez?

ALEX

There is not a little fez. There is no little fez for the crow.

JAMES

Do I have enough craft skill to make a little fez for the crow.

BRYN

No

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ALEX

What you don't have is enough time to make a little craft...

JAMES

I respect his craft...

ALEX

[Crow noise]

JAMES

So Bertie is going to present himself, pomp and pageantry because he's meeting Mr Crow for the first time.

ALEX

Handle animal.

JAMES

That is a total of 17

ALEX

Pomp and pageantry?

JAMES

Included pomp and pageantry

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ALEX

Deduct pomp and pageantry rather than add it. This crow is not a class traitor.

BRYN

17

ALEX

[Crow noise] It's still kind of ok with you even with that penalty.

BRYN

Wait 15

ALEX

Yeah it's 15 but that's still enough to be at least ok.

JAMES

So does Bertie deduce from this that this is a working class crow?

ALEX

Apparently so.

JAMES

Ok

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BRYN

A revolutionary working class crow.

JAMES

A revolutionary working class crow. Goodness, alright.

ALEX

You're part of the problem Bertie

JAMES

Yeah I know that.

ALEX

However it's both a working class hero crow but it's also quite the pragmatist and it's aware that it's in a cage.

JAMES

Ok so it's willing to form short term alliances...

ALEX

Correct. If it had a daughter it would marry it into your family in a way of establishing allegiance for future capitalisation upon.

JAMES

So Mr Crow it seems you have a certain community of interest here.

ALEX

I'm just going to accelerate because I can't deal with this now right now. I realise that you're just now wilfully hunting for NPCs to drag into your orbit.

JAMES

No, no...

ALEX

Yeah whatever.

JAMES

...Bertie's trying to get information from the crow. He's going to offer the crow freedom in exchange for information.

ALEX

Right. I am going to continue this then

JAMES

Respect my craft.

ALEX

Go for it.

JAMES

Ok. Good. Ok. So then Mr Crow it seems that we have a community of interest, hm. You have something I want and I have something that you want. look at me out here Mr Crow flapping my arms. Look. Look at this wonderful freedom I'm enjoying.

ALEX

[Crow noise] people choose to listen to this podcast for pleasure

(laughing)

JAMES

Look at this. Do you know how many bird seed I've got here Mr Crow. Bertie holds the bird seed out flat in his hand and then pecks at his with his mouth. Flat hand, nom, nom, nom. What delicious bird seed Mr Crow.

ALEX

Some people are on the tube right now and this is how they're spending their time.

JAMES

All of this bird seed could be yours

ALEX

You could be learning a new language but [crow noise]

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BEN

You're learning crow!

JAMES

Yeah so...

BRYN

I hate to crow about it

JAMES

This is what I'm doing. He's crowing at me and I'm crowing at him. We both know crow-ap. Thank you.

LYDIA

Not your best work but it's good.

JAMES

Look I can't have such gold all the time. A bit of pewter manages to sneak its way in and you turn your nose up at it.

(laughing)

Respect your craft!

Ok Mr Crow, now how would you rate your desire for freedom on a scale of 1 to argh

ALEX

[Crow noise]

JAMES

[Crow noise]. Now Mr Crow we are after Franz Kafka. Do you have any idea where Franz Kafka might be – and Bertie his hands on the door.

ALEX

[Crow noise]

JAMES

Bertie opens it ajar. Mr Crow. Mr Crow would you like to get out Mr Crow?

ALEX

[Crow noise]

LYDIA

Do you speak crow Bertie?

(laughing)

Maybe he's telling you where Kafka is.

JAMES

Don't interrupt my process.

(laughing)

ALEX

Fun fact, the crow for home invasion is [crow noise]

BEN

Hang on a minute, do you think these are a familiar and might actually talk to you?

JAMES

You know I hadn't thought about that

(laughing)

ALEX

Gah. Oh god. I can't have...

BEN

Lydia's sprung a leak.

ALEX

I can't!

BEN

I love how keen you are to make it very clear to people...

JAMES

We're 70 episodes in, doesn't realise that I am Bertie and differently. Oh my god. Ok. Right, yes, so yes that's obviously what Bertie...Bertie in character has just realised this

ALEX

I do enjoy listening to someone have a character that can't articulate the phrase – oh this is clearly a wizard's familiar. A concept I'm familiar with because they're not so it's just...could it...I have to rearticulate this entire thing until someone else helps me.

BRYN

If only he had the circlet of command.

ALEX

Oh that would make life way easier.

BRYN

He can't speak to animals.

JAMES

Yeah that would be really handy wouldn't it. Just wait for the postal service to turn up.

ALEX

So moving on.

BEN

Wait so do you think that's a wizard's familiar and it can talk to you. I don't think it is.

JAMES

How do you know?

BEN

Well unless it's playing dumb.

JAMES

Are you playing dumb Mr Crow?

ALEX

[Crow noises]

JAMES

Don't give me that! You know where he was.

ALEX

Hamid is definitely here at this point.

BRYN

What's going on?

JAMES

Hamid is this crow a wizard's familiar?

ALEX

[Crow noise]

BRYN

How would I be able to tell?

JAMES

I dunno, magic.

BRYN

Is it speaking English?

JAMES

Bertie looks at the crow

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BRYN

Is it speaking Czech?

ALEX

[Crow noise]

JAMES

For some reason I know that he's not speaking Czech at this point.

BRYN

It's probably not then

JAMES

Ohh. Bertie puts the cage down on the floor.

BRYN

Should we search for clues?

BEN

I want to see what he does with this cage first.

ALEX

Oh for goodness sake. I'm not dedicating an episode...an episode to a crow in a cage

LYDIA

You put a crow in a cage in a room. You knew this would happen.

ALEX

It's true. I put a thing in the world. Of course, of course we have to disappear down this rabbit hole.

JAMES

Look it's an animal, Bertie has a handle animal skill. If there's an animal Bertie's going to handle it.

ALEX

That's fine.

BEN

What are you going to try and do with the cage then?

JAMES

So Bertie looks at the crow and the cage. Thinks for a moment about the symbolism of it with his own life and his cage. The privilege around him and the golden confines of the contract and just looks at the crow and thinks is there a moment of spiritual union between him and the crow and just goes – nah – turns around and leaves the crow in the cage.

BEN

I'm going to sidle up the crow and just open the door.

ALEX

Ok you open the door. [crow noise]

BEN

Go on. Or not. Whatever.

LYDIA

He's spent so long in those cramped, dark interiors that he's finding it intimidating to leave them and experience the wider world. I wonder what that must feel like

JAMES

Look I didn't empathise with the crow. I'm damned if you're going to. Anybody else? Hamid? This crow is also short. Hm.

BEN

Hang on a minute?

JAMES

What? Grizzop this crow is also short.

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BEN

No I didn't want to be included.

JAMES

Oh Grizzop this crow is of a moderate size.

BRYN

I really don't think the crow is important. Can we just search the room for stuff that is.

JAMES

Woah.

BRYN

Maybe he is important.

JAMES

See I told you so.

LYDIA

What did he say? What?

ALEX

[Crow noises]

BRYN

Don't give us that. We know you can talk English now, we heard you. Not English, Czech, why do I keep saying that.

ALEX

So the crow flies down onto what is basically the seed bag that's there, starts pecking it open and just starts eating some of the seed. [Crow noises]

BRYN

We'll take the seed away from you unless you talk to us.

BEN

Now hang on a minute. I'll walk up to the crow, bend down, get right close and say – right, if I scratch your back, and you scratch mine.

ALEX

[Crow noise] pecks your face a little bit. Doesn't deal damage. It then grabs a bit of this seed and then flies back up onto the cage, closes the cage, locks the cage and sits there eating it, watching you all.

LYDIA

That's a smug crow.

BEN

Gonna roll diplomacy. That is a 23

ALEX

You succeed.

BEN

Ok. Look if Kafka isn't found you're not going to get much interesting things happening and I'm sure an animal of intelligence might need stimulus of a certain kind. If you help us, we'll take you out into the wide world. I'm sure an intelligent animal like yourself will succeed greatly. Or what do you want?

LYDIA

You could join our gang. That sounds fun. We're taking in people right now. Looking for...

JAMES

I have a vacancy – and Bertie just opens the papoose that has been dangling.

ALEX

The crow looks at...

LYDIA

That's not actually...

JAMES

Bertie retrieves a bottle of cheap brandy from his inventory and just uncorks it and just goes, looks mournfully at the crow, holding the papoose.

BRYN

Maybe it's intimidated by the falcons Bertie

ALEX

2000

BEN

2000 what?

ALEX

What do you think 2000 chicken nuggets. 2000 gold

BEN

Oh right

BRYN

What do you want gold for?

ALEX

What do you want gold for?

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BRYN

Buying stuff

ALEX

Goods and services [crow noise]

JAMES

I like this crow

ALEX

Mostly services. I don't have much need for goods, I don't have thumbs

BRYN

Where are you going to keep the gold?

ALEX

I'll hire someone to hold it. It looks to Hamid, looks back to Grizzop who's just like a bit dim.

BEN

Well I mean the person you hired to hold it might walk off with it and you are in fact a crow.

ALEX

I'll hire someone to keep an eye on them

BEN

You won't have any money.

ALEX

Custody custodes.

BEN

I don't know what that means

JAMES

I do

ALEX

It's true, he does.

BRYN

It's a good point but I do feel like crows do not normally take an active role in the economy.

ALEX

I'm up and coming.

JAMES

See well I have a certain respect for the insurgent bourgeoisie classes, hm, even if they come in such a small, unusual package.

ALEX

1750

JAMES

We're haggling quite effectively. We've not even made a counter offer.

BRYN

20

ALEX

The bird proceeds to void itself vaguely in your direction.

JAMES

Definitely likes that idea

LYDIA

1000

BRYN

No, look if you think about it you're a lot smaller than any of us so proportionately the same amount of gold could buy you a great deal more.

ALEX

Turns to Grizzop – I don't think he understands how money works.

LYDIA

1000

JAMES

Hang on, hang on one moment. What are we paying this crow for?

(laughing)

Just 100 gold?

BEN

For information about Kafka

LYDIA

Yeah what have you got? What have you got?

ALEX

Half now, half after

LYDIA

You can't give us half a clue now and half after

ALEX

Yeah I can.

BEN

Do it then

ALEX

Franz Kafka is...

BEN

Not good enough

JAMES

You walked right into that one, didn't you.

ALEX

That's my half.

JAMES

We know that...

BEN

Hang on a minute

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JAMES

We know that the clue about Franz Kafka only has three words in it.

BEN

You just gave us that information for free, that wasn't part of the actual deal.

ALEX

It's an enticement

BEN

No

JAMES

Well perhaps you are soon to come into a great deal of money Mr Crow. Is it Mr Crow?

ALEX

Don't really have a name.

BEN

Ooh Barry

JAMES

Barry, that's an excellent name. Barry.

ALEX

Alright.

JAMES

Barry, Barry, Barry, if I may. You're soon to come into money Barry. Have you given a thought as to how you might invest that money

ALEX

Takes a moment – I think I'll offer short term loans to people who are looking for immediate purchases that are necessarily unwise but charge an extortionate amount of interest.

JAMES

I like this crow.

BEN

I don't know if we want to give this crow any money

BRYN

No I don't think we want to either

LYDIA

He wants to be a loan shark

JAMES

Loan crow. But of course if you are to enter into such a business arrangement Barry. Barry Crow, hm, I'm picturing it now. Barry Crow, Payday Loans. A golden sign over a perch and the perch encrusted in diamonds.

BRYN

Do we actually have 1000 gold to give him?

JAMES

Yes we do. Bertie has.

ALEX

I love that James is still personally maintaining eye contact whilst making a pitch and is like shut up, shut up, I've got this.

JAMES

But you're going to need it. It's a dangerous business Barry, hm, what would happen if perhaps somebody were to default on your loan. You would need to have some enforcement. Someone to enforce your contracts. A basic foundational precept of debt in the first place. We're of one mind on this I can tell Barry. You're a very wise crow. Now think as well what might happen if somebody were to loan money from you, take that money and suddenly decide not to repay it, hm, indeed or to see that you were a lone crow. You would need protection would you not Barry? Think for a moment Barry.

ALEX

Kind of gives that head bob that birds give where it's quizzical but also jerky and sudden.

JAMES

Think as well Barry about your market. Your target demographic and where they might be found.

ALEX

Paris!

JAMES

Short paid, term pay day Paris

ALEX

Paris

BRYN

Have you heard about what's happened in Paris?

JAMES

He's got a bird's eye view now...

(laughing)

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ALEX

Everyone knows.

JAMES

He's a very wise man. A very wise little crow.

LYDIA

It only happened yesterday

BRYN

Well more like last week

ALEX

Well given that you've spent an entire...almost a week just sat in the hotel room waiting for things to play out as well because it went from bad to worse to worse to worse. You left and it was like city wide riots.

BEN

Some news will have travelled by word of mouth

JAMES

Now Barry think about it. There's anarchy on the streets in Paris. Think how vulnerable a loan crow would be. There are archers around.

ALEX

Loan crow, nice

JAMES

Thank you. How better to both not only expand your markets but also provide security in transit that if you were to travel with four powerful adventurers...

ALEX

The crow's head is slowly starting to bob

JAMES

Hm, think about it. Think about it Barry. Makes a lot of sense.

LYDIA

Is he falling asleep?

BEN

I dunno

JAMES

Either way we're on to a winner

ALEX

It's definitely asleep. The soothing tones of your voice have taken this animal...

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JAMES

Bertie's tones are soothing. Ok fine.

BRYN

To a crow.

JAMES

Yeah ok

ALEX

You're speaking of payday loans, of riches, of an explorative person who you could use.

BRYN

I thought this was a crow with cast consciousness.

LYDIA

Sasha grabs the crow...

JAMES

No he has consciousness, it's just his class is a petty bourgeois. He's a small businessman, he's very conscious of his class position.

BEN

Hold up guys, something is happening.

LYDIA

Sasha grabs the crow.

ALEX

Oh my god, thank you!

LYDIA

For goodness sake just tell us where Kafka is – and grabs him around the neck.

ALEX

Give me a reflex save

LYDIA

That's the one thing I'm good at. $18 + 8$ is 26

ALEX

26. Yeah. He kind of rattles around a little bit and then goes [crow noise]

LYDIA

Yeah where's Kafka? What's going on

ALEX

[crow noise]

JAMES

See this could've gone so nicely Barry, hm. You could've accompanied us on money lending adventures across...

ALEX

He took the book

LYDIA

He took the book?

ALEX

Took the book

LYDIA

Ok – she releases him – which book? Do you know Grizzop?

BEN

No

ALEX

It just looks really pleadingly at Grizzop in what's meant to be like a manoeuvre diplomatically but it's not that. It's just – help me.

LYDIA

I'm not...she's not...I'm not throttling him. I'm just holding him. He's making it up. He's just play acting!

BEN

Sense motive on the crow

(laughing)

That's a 12

ALEX

Ah that's crow, it's sketchy. It's not a particularly strong.

LYDIA

I'm not choking him

BEN

Yeah alright. I know you're making it up

ALEX

[Coughing noise]

BRYN

Hamid stops paying attention to this conversation several minutes ago and has been searching the room. 23.

(laughing)

ALEX

Following everything that is required from this scenario, I think we'll take a break.

And welcome back, right so what you have found, funnily enough you found a clue. What you also noticed is that at some point Einstein fell asleep whilst looking and just kind of fell back down into a chair that he presumably summons whilst the crow talk was going on and he's just kind of napping gently in a chair. The unseen servant is still rifling through stuff. What you do find is a large tome basically was down the back of a work bench. You see that the work bench itself appeared to have been cleared as if to study something and down the back is a quite big tome, say like a foot and a half, maybe two feet wide. Like a big tome. Heavy. And you pull it up from the back and you slam it down with a thud and it appears to be stitched from various pieces of leather.

LYDIA

Oh dear. What kind of leather?

ALEX

And it basically has an inscription which has faded on the top, to the point where you're not really able to read it.

BRYN

I blow the dust off it dramatically.

ALEX

How to cook humans. No, it has...give me a perception check

BRYN

I can cast read magic if it's a magical script. Oh dear.

LYDIA

Critical fail?

BRYN

That was a natural 1

LYDIA

So it's definitely deerskin or venom. It's no kind of suspicious leather whatsoever.

(laughing)

ALEX

You're just not able to make out the inscription on the front. It was just an embossed title like someone had done an embossing on it but opening it, do you?

BRYN

Yeah

ALEX

Ok. No it's fine. It's empty. It's just the binding. On closer examination it looks like someone has torn or cut the entirety of the book's contents from its leather binding so it's just a massive, imposing looking tome with all of the sheathes inside removed. [crow noise] that's the one.

LYDIA

So he took the innards of the book?

JAMES

So what you've basically led us to there is a ring binder. That is...

LYDIA

Human skin ring binder.

ALEX

I'd have gotten away with it if it weren't for you meddling kids. No.

JAMES

Kafka!

LYDIA

Yeah where did he go then?

ALEX

Kind of looks at you and then jerks his head downwards

LYDIA

To the city. Right.

BEN

Makes sense with all the zombies

LYDIA

Yeah, where...do you know roughly where he might be going?

ALEX

Looney bin

LYDIA

So that's where he should go or that's where he is?

ALEX

Er he might be there.

LYDIA

Are you setting us up for some kind of arc in asylum

ALEX

He went a bit weird. He was studying the book and he went a bit weird

LYDIA

Right

BRYN

This book?

BEN

What's it called?

BRYN

I can't make it out. Can you read this?

BEN

Er...

JAMES

Bertie has a lot of languages so he has a look.

ALEX

The only one who's really going to stand a chance is Bertie. Give me the roll but I'm going to point out that I'm not going to have every, single person roll because it's actually quite hard to make out anyway. You're looking for a very high roll.

JAMES

18

ALEX

You make out the word "mortis" Latin, beyond that, pfft.

JAMES

Well it's related to death magic in some way because of the Latin route here but then we are investigating a necromancer so that's not an enormous surprise

BEN

What are the studies. Someone take a rubbing. You can't read it, take a rubbing

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JAMES

Not in public, what?

BRYN

I'll do that quickly. I find a piece of paper and a piece of charcoal.

BEN

Excellent

ALEX

You make out four words basically squared off with one another across the front of the book which is "Mortis Securitas Libertas Omnium"

LYDIA

So laboratory opium mortuary, what was the other one?

BRYN

You speak Latin don't you Bertie?

JAMES

Of course, yes – Bertie reads it and it translates as?

ALEX

Give me a linguistics check

JAMES

That would be 14

ALEX

14.

JAMES

Yes

ALEX

The best translation you can give is something like freedom from death, freedom for all or freedom from death...death for all, like the grammar's gone slightly weird. The way it's laid out, the type facing and so on means that the order may be...may have an extra layer to it that you're missing. You know like a poetic technique or maybe you're missing something that's straight over your head. But literally freedom from death, freedom for all.

JAMES

Bertie makes that clear

LYDIA

So basically it's about raising mass zombies

BEN

That scans

BRYN

Seems that way

LYDIA

Seems to fit with the plague thing

BEN

Right, so he's gone to an asylum

ALEX

I don't know where he's gone. He could've gone anywhere. He should be in one.

LYDIA

I think he was making a joke

ALEX

Cruel joke

BEN

Not very funny

ALEX

Shut your face. Crow joke

LYDIA

Stigma is never funny, even for crows.

JAMES

I feel that you can't really defend crow jokes. I don't think you can really make the argument that any sort of prejudice against neurotypical behaviour is an inherent part of crow culture. I'm not sure that's a valid defence Barry

ALEX

So's your face. Crow jokes.

JAMES

Right, last chance...

LYDIA

Alright, Crow. Alright, what bar would Kafka be in? Where would you go looking for him?

ALEX

I dunno.

LYDIA

Right well...

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BRYN

Should we ask Professor Einstein about this?

LYDIA

Yeah – gonna put the crow back in the cage

BEN

I'll walk up to Einstein and just poke him awake.

ALEX

You poke him. Let's see if he wakes shall we. He does. He kind of – what?

What do you want?

BEN

We found it

ALEX

Found what?

BEN

The book

ALEX

Ooh

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BRYN

It looks like Kafka...

ALEX

Out the way. Out the way. He runs over and starts grabbing it and yanking it.

BRYN

He took all the pages out.

ALEX

What did you do?

BRYN

Kafka took all the pages out before he ran off.

ALEX

He kind of holds it up

BRYN

Are you familiar with this book Professor?

ALEX

Are you not?

BRYN

No!

ALEX

He kind of drops it and then you see him cast a spell at it once. Nothing happens. He does it again. It's also the size of his torso, he's not a big man

BEN

Right so now we've found your book and now you might want to help us, where do you think Kafka might be and can you summon all of your little wizard-y friends and we can have a nice big chat and I can find out where Kafka's gonna be before he summons hundreds more zombies. He's using plague pits

ALEX

Oh this is so bad. Ok fine.

BRYN

We should go and see the council right now.

ALEX

Yes, yes, you're right. You're absolutely right. We should...he teleports away

BEN

Well I know where they meet at least so let's go.

BRYN

Let's go.

JAMES

One moment – Bertie's going to release Barry, I mean he can unlock his own cage anyway but he's just gonna do that and Bertie is also going to search the room assuming there is some sort of index. Is there...is the room sorted using a Dewey decimal system or anything?

ALEX

Sorted, bless you.

JAMES

Ok

BRYN

We don't have time to look through everything else Bertie.

JAMES

I'll catch up. And Bertie is going to be searching for books on planer law

ALEX

Ok.

BRYN

Bertie, no. We don't have time. You won't be able to find the building unless we're all going together.

JAMES

I'm learning Hamid

BEN

Well if we don't go now Einstein will probably finish the meeting without us.

BRYN

Exactly. Bertie, come on!

BEN

I'll be going

JAMES

Bertie grabs three books at random off the shelf.

ALEX

Ok, that's fine. You pull three tomes from the shelf, all of which are written in draconic. Two of which the title seem to move under your eyes and you can't get a fix on them, the last one is mass summon and you, a beginner's guide

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JAMES

Ooh

ALEX

By Franz Kafka

JAMES

Ooh. Bertie takes that. He drops the two he can't read. That's basically anything with a reading age of about 16 plus.

ALEX

Sure.

JAMES

But he takes the mass summoning

ALEX

Sure

BRYN

Puts it in his cursed bag of holding

JAMES

No he doesn't

(laughing)

Puts it in his bag, bag. So what was that again, mass summoning...

BRYN

And you

ALEX

Mass summoning and you: a beginner's guide. Franz Kafka. Do you open it to have a quick look or are you gonna look at it later?

JAMES

Not yet. Bit of lavatory reading.

ALEX

So what are you doing?

LYDIA

Running after Grizzop

BEN

Because I know where they met presumably

ALEX

Yep. Presumably it's at the council chamber and presumably that was the same council...I mean how many council chambers are they gonna have?

BEN

Who knows but I'll take a punt

LYDIA

I mean it is a wizard's university that's constantly rearranging itself.

ALEX

Welcome to the infinite council chambers, which one would you like?

JAMES

The council is the heart to the university, therefore there are four chambers

ALEX

Ehhh. So heading out the, what's the sort of nominal offices, domicile of them. You head back out and head to the centre of the university. Turns out that as the rest of you are jogging along and keeping up, it becomes apparent that as much as it seems to be random floating and bouncing around, actually there is a fixed point in the middle of this and everything seems to be circuiting around it and as you're running and waiting for the next one to align or doing a quick hop as they overlap one another and so on, there might actually be a pattern to it.

JAMES

Yeah are these in a regular orbit

ALEX

It appears like it might be but the pattern alludes all of you

BRYN

A celestial dance

ALEX

It's either complete chaos or just incredibly complication and unless you were to spend an enormous amount of time studying it, you won't know.

BEN

Basically an armillary with these

ALEX

Yeah pretty much. So heading towards the centre and as you're getting there things start looking a bit more formal, a little less like you're at the edge of a campus and more like you're heading in towards teaching areas and so on. There's one that flows past which appears to just be a massive, completely solid stone ball, that's huge. It's easily the size of a ten storey building that just zooms past quietly and there's a few other weird ones that no doubt have peculiar reasons for them but you eventually head towards the centre and what you see there are both...a lot older than everything else you've seen and a way more humble building. In fact at a glance it becomes apparent what this

was is it may have been what the university used to be an enormous time ago because everything else, the foundations are kind of floating. They seem like they have been made in the air and are floating in the air. This has a big old hunk of earth and rock and stuff attached to the bottom so it's more like a floating rock with a building upon it kind of thing. It has a much more gothic vibe than everything else. I mean everything is quite elaborate but this is more elaborate in a very aged way. Hamid you recognise the architecture as being the same as the Bolla's Roost. It's certainly the same period and it appears to have no magical elements to it. It's sensibly architected. It doesn't seem to have any weird colours or anything and heading up, you know Grizzop that if you head there and basically knock, they warned you going in don't do any magic here. A) you won't be able to and B) it's considered the grossed faux pas to even attempt it, clerical or otherwise and yeah there's just the big double doors but you're gonna have to knock

BRYN

I never got to go in this building last time I was here

BEN

Oh right. Knock, knock, knock

BRYN

Is there anything we should know?

BEN

Er...oh yeah, don't do magic

ALEX

Door opens. There is what looks, at least to our eyes in this world, a perfectly traditional butler. Black top and tails, white gloves and...

JAMES

Ooh snooker

ALEX

Pretty much. And spectacles and they are actually quite young but it's just – how may I help you sir?

BEN

We're here to see the council. We came with Albert Einstein but he left.

ALEX

Ah he did warn us that someone would be coming along.

BEN

Good, he remembered.

ALEX

Are you...so I'm going to presume that you're the orc. He's not what he used to be. Ok please come in, I'd like to apologise on his behalf. Please come in.

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LYDIA

Is that a terrible insult?

BEN

It's just wrong.

ALEX

Gestures you in. Closes the door. They'll be with you in a moment. Let me just announce you, once you hear your announcement obviously please step in.

LYDIA

We're the...

BRYN

London and Other London Outstanding Mercenary Group

BEN

That's a great name!

LYDIA

We were working on it for quite a long time

(laughing)

ALEX

If you'll excuse me – he heads to a door. You're in quite a plain corridor. Again, to more experienced eyes in this world, it looks more like what you'd expect a proper academic institution to be in the red brick style. So it's just wood panelling. It's not particularly hugely extravagant so much as just old. He knocks, enters, there's a blah, blah, blah. Introducing the London and Other London Outstanding Mercenary Group. The door opens and then you're showed through into a room.

LYDIA

Yeah and a subcontractor.

ALEX

And a subcontractor – he adds flawlessly. Heading into the room, it's actually quite a small room. There's another fireplace that's not lit. There is a very interesting stained glass window at the far end of the room. Give me a knowledge history if you have it. Religion won't cut it.

JAMES

16

ALEX

It is depicting the magical restoration of Prague. So after Rome fell and everything went to mess it is depicting the moment when Bolla Smok determined this region as its own and raised the university to protect the people and it's very elaborate and it is effectively demonstrating the moment

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that Prague became a power in its own right and was free from the shackles of the world that came before. It's quite pretty, it's quite beautiful but it is mundane, it's not magically moving or anything. And sat around the table you see...

BRYN

All the people that you listed earlier?

ALEX

No

BRYN

Oh

ALEX

You see an elderly gentleman with a carefully crafted beard and a bald, is it pronounced pate, I've only ever read that word

BEN

Yeah

ALEX

A bald pate.

BEN

It's not a bald pâté

ALEX

Sure

JAMES

If you've got hair in your pâté though...

ALEX

You see Einstein and you see another woman who is...

LYDIA

Is that Eldarion?

ALEX

No. You see another woman who is comparatively plain looking apart from her eyes which are fierce as anything. It looks someone took a pair of eyes from some Viking warrior somewhere and put them into a quite plain looking woman. Like woah. Fierce as anything. There are two chairs which have black shrouds draped over them. One chair is empty and another chair is empty. That is everyone who is at the table. They all like you and Einstein immediately stands and goes – yep they're the one who found the thing. You should come in. We should have a talk. Come on, come on, come on. Come sit down.

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He gestures to the butler who goes to the edges of the room which has additional chairs but not in the big throne types...

LYDIA

Yeah we found a lot of zombies under Prague and then we found a book about making lots of zombies but we think that they might possibly be connected.

ALEX

The woman with the fierce eyes looks at the other two. They share a moment

BRYN

It seems you lied to our colleague here earlier about whether or not you knew who was responsible. Because clearly it was Franz Kafka who used to be a member of this body

BEN

Yeah and that decision got a lot of people killed

ALEX

The man with the bald pate and crafted beard gently but firmly holds a finger up for a moment for quiet and they start leaning across and having a quiet consultation at the other end of the table to you.

LYDIA

Well this is helpful

BEN

They did this a lot the first time

ALEX

Right if you could come please sit down. We think it's probably best that we discuss things in a little more detail. We'd hoped to avoid this but no doubt once we explain ourselves you'll understand how and why

BEN

Yeah but you didn't help to avoid this

BRYN

Might I be so bold as to suggest that some introductions are in order.

ALEX

Perfectly, fair enough

JAMES

I am Sir Bertrand Macguffingham of the noble seat of Old Botham and absolute pleasure

ALEX

The gentleman who was just talking fails to hide a little bit of a snigger behind a hand

JAMES

Bertie does not notice

ALEX

Not...yeah...it is a subtle move for what it's worth. It's just a sort of, hm. A pleasure to meet you. Sir was it?

JAMES

Sir Bertrand Macguffingham, yes

ALEX

Pleased to meet you *Sir* Bertrand Macguffingham

BRYN

Hamid Saleh Haroun al-Tahan, Sorcerer

ALEX

Pleasure

BRYN

There's a slightly quizzical look that quickly passes over Hamid's face as he says that for the first time

ALEX

Einstein doesn't react. The gentleman that you're talking to doesn't react. The woman with the fierce eyes, they just look at you and bore into your soul the second that you spoke. Yeah she kinda registered that one. That's fine.

LYDIA

I'm alright. I'm just working with them.

ALEX

It's customary to provide a name. Not necessarily a real name

LYDIA

Sasha Ricketts?

(laughing)

BRYN

We are the London and Other London Outstanding Mercenary Group and this is our recent associate who I believe you've met before.

BEN

Yeah you've already met me. Grizzop drik acht Amsterdam. Paladin of Artemis. Helping you out.

ALEX

The woman leans back a little bit, again looks at you with the fierce eyes and just really quietly, to the point you can barely hear it, just goes – we don't want to be here. Maintaining a civil and ready head will serve you well.

BEN

Ok

ALEX

They all basically gesture for you. The big throne-y-esque chairs are pulled away so that the more mundane chairs can be placed at the table and they gesture for you to sit

BRYN

And you are?

ALEX

The gentleman you've been speaking to first stands, straightens a waistcoat, strokes a little beard and goes – Sigmund Freud. I'm the director and professor of enchantment studies here at the university. Sits. Albert Einstein stands up and goes – Einstein, Albert, Mr. Sits down. They look at him. Conjuraton. Sits down again. Stands up again. University, conjuration, university. And gives a wink, sits down and then might've nodded off. It's not sure. He's...there may have been an accident at some point involving Einstein. That's certainly the vibe he's giving off. The woman stands gently, looks at all of you, hands behind her back. Far more severe than the others and just goes – Marie Curie, I'm the

director of transmutation studies and in lieu of the rest currently abjuration and divination and necromancy so we'll have to deal with the...

BRYN

Hamid looks incredibly impressed.

ALEX

She sits down, carefully, neatly. So, Marie Curie speaking at this point. Again very, very quietly, super understated – you were originally brought onto this situation because we did not wish to disclose to the general population that a member of the highest ranking order of wizards has not only gone rogue but stolen an incredibly potent magical artifact without the supervision of others in order to enact some kind of ludicrous and archaic ritual. The reason that you were not made aware of anything more than this is we would hope that you would track them down and we were intending to breach the pact with the rest of Prague and deal with the situation ourselves because as noble an idea as it is that whatever is down there is dealt with by down there and we should not interfere, he will kill all of them. We needed someone who could find him, report back and then we would deal with it ourselves. How do you think the rest of the population will handle the situation finding out that arguably one of the most powerful people in the world might have gone...what was it you said Einstein?

Barmy. Completely off his rocker. Crazy.

Subsides back into his doze

Yes quite. It was a necessary action

BEN

Well with the greatest of respects it didn't quite work, did it and lots of people have been killed now and really you made it sound really nice but what you mean is "we screwed up and really don't want people to know about it" and I don't care.

JAMES

Well I mean I can see that perspective. I mean as long as you're not caught it's all basically fine.

ALEX

She just takes a moment and then turns back to Grizzop. Doesn't even like...it doesn't seem to be a move. It doesn't seem to be a social move against Bertie, it's just this conversation is clearly not going to go anywhere and just returns to Grizzop.

How would you have suggested handling this better given that two of the council are already dead?

BEN

Let me know that it was Franz Kafka first and I could have a look in his study or his living quarters for clues

ALEX

Ah of course you're experienced with incredibly potent magical artefacts from ancient Rome that can corrupt the minds of the user. Of course that...

BEN

Well in which case how were you expecting me to find him at all?

ALEX

Because he is out of place. He is out of his time effectively at this point. He is just someone who is running around. Ultimately we don't believe he's in control of his faculties...

JAMES

Ah...

ALEX

...you wouldn't be the only person that – she takes a moment and steadies herself. Everyone give me a perception check

JAMES

9

BRYN

26

LYDIA

17

BEN

16

ALEX

Everyone apart from Bertie...

(laughing)

...a twitch has developed just below her right eye and there's clearly a heartbeat there that has come from [slow heart rate noise] to [fast heart rate noise]. There is no other change in her demeanour whatsoever. At all.

Look there's a reason that he has that book and it's not a reason that we're likely to share.

At which point the gentleman Freud stands up and goes – Marie we're going to have to tell them otherwise there's not going to be any progress here.

At which point she takes a moment, composes herself, sits down and he leans across the table and says – right, what do the rest of you know about the Harlequins?

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BEN

The Who-lequins?

LYDIA

Not...

BRYN

Not very much

BRYN

I mean they play card games, right? Something like that

JAMES

Rugby I thought

BRYN

I believe they're an anti-meritocratic organisation.

ALEX

They kind of all share a look and go – that's one way of putting we suppose, yes. Let's say that Franz Kafka was one of them and let's say that Franz Kafka took it upon himself to extend the reach of his studies beyond the academic in what's a misguided attempt to further his ideals and was not ready for what he activated, let's say.

LYDIA

So what he did was he made lots of zombies so did he not intend to make hundreds of zombies because it seems to me that making hundreds of zombies is quite a hard things to do and that book says death for all. It's about making lots of zombies so where in that process was there a misstep?

BRYN

Well what I think they're saying is that it was the previous research that he was doing that opened his mind and now he wants to make zombies but I might have misunderstood.

ALEX

Einstein perks up and goes – you see, the idiots they don't get it, uhhh. They all want to make zombies. Zombies are the by product. Have you got any idea how easy it is to make zombies. I can fall asleep and make 50 zombies. What's wrong with you? God! We don't need them at all. Look at them.

At which point Marie gives him a look. Fine. Go, do your talking thing [snoring noise]. He's out like a light again

LYDIA

Wait, wait, so what...what is he trying to...

ALEX

So our role isn't just educational. Our role is to safeguard a rather large number of items and knowledge's which are best kept on, let's say, the

downlow. I believe that's something that people have been saying a lot recently. It's certainly how we've been operating. Anyway long story short Rome was exactly as destroyed as you'd think. More made it out than you'd think. What you've been witnessing and what no doubt will continue happening are the very tips of a boil and that boil is the symptom of a significantly larger sickness. We had made a number of safeguards against these items being removed which he circumvented. We found the book cover, that was actually doing a lot of the work. The scale of what he'll be attempting to do, if he is attempting to do it is so much larger than a smattering of corpses.

BRYN

Oh dear

BEN

Alright. So give us all the information so we can go down there and not be immediately killed as soon as we find him

BRYN

It seems to me...if I understand your position correct is what you need are agents who are able to operate discretely in Prague below without involving you as much as possible and then to call you in at the appropriate moment to deal with Mr Kafka. Now I do feel that we would be able to do that but we can't do that kind of mission unless we are given all the available information. So my colleague here would not have been able to have been properly discrete if you hadn't told him there was a need for that and by providing him the

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information of it being Mr Kafka then he would have also been able to get a great deal ahead. Now if you would like to hire the London and Other London Outstanding Mercenary Group to complete this mission we would of course be very pleased to conduct it for you.

BEN

In cooperation with the Church of Artemis.

BRYN

In cooperation with the Church of Artemis of course. But we do need to make sure we know all the information first and that we're all upfront with each other.

ALEX

All of you give me...actually, bear with. Give me a diplomacy check on that speech

BRYN

Natural 20

ALEX

Ooh. It was a well worded speech so I'm glad that the dice are acting up a bit actually. They all share a look. Then they all take a moment. They all pull off a ring, they nudge Einstein who wakes up, sees what's going on and takes a ring off as well and they all place them in the middle. Every, single one of them is a copy of the ring that Zolf had and a copy of the ring that Rakefine had. And

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they all go – right well – Marie sort of leading the charge – we think it's time that humans took their role back in the world and this is a natural consequence of that.

And I think I'll end the episode there

JAMES

Ooh

BRYN

They killed Bolla Smok!

LYDIA

They killed the dragon!

BEN

So what you're saying basically is that Zolf left as soon as this plot kicked off

ALEX

Yeah he did! That's why I hate ya!

(laughing)

BRYN

I hope we can wrap the rest of this plot up in the afternoon remaining of that day because we've got to get to the opera in the evening

ALEX

I mean you could just miss the tickets to your sister's...

BRYN

Don't be ridiculous Alex! Also we've got to get time to buy outfits for the entire party. This is a nightmare guys!

BEN

And the ball's tonight!

EVERYONE

Bye!

[Show Theme - Outro]

ALEX

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