

Rosebush (S3, E1)

SFX:

INTRO MUSIC

Rev: Hey, everybody. Before we get into the first episode of Season Three, we want to take a moment to thank all of our new patrons who joined us in the month of June: Casey McKenzie, Kevin Roberts, Anon A Mouse, Harper Jean, Dan Zirkle, Izzy, Gregory Bulby, Wade Pearson, Joshua Pierce, Rolling Misadventures, Jacob Bernard, Paul Steinhibel, YoungSpaceDad, TheZMage, Jessica Falcon, Vincent Kirk, Stephen Baker, Heather Roberts, Paul Thomas, and Conor Esselink. So thank you to all of you for joining us this month on Patreon, and thank you to all of our Patreon supporters who make everything we do possible. If you'd like to join up with our crew, head over to Patreon.com/TheCritshow, and there you can see all the available tiers we have, with tiers starting at just one dollar. And with that, welcome to Season Three.

SFX:

CRITSHOW STINGER

SFX:

ORGAN MUSIC

Tass: "I have too many stories. There's just too damn many. He and I have been through so much. TJ was one of the first people to greet me and make me feel welcome when I had finally gotten out of my tiny little hillbilly town. He was someone that showed me the power of positivity, and that even if you feel like an outcast, all you got to do is find the right other group of outcasts, and then you can be yourself and do great things. He saved my life so many times. Even brought me back once. Uh ... Like metaphorically, I guess. Because I was on the brink. And that pure soul made me want to fight and be better. He showed me what it means to ..." [Deep breath] "Um ... Just go with your instinct, when the instinct is to uplift instead of destroy. The one story of the hundreds, thousands of ridiculous things we ever did together, the one that I think about the most to put me in a better mood is probably the simplest, maybe even the least interesting to you all. But we were in a class together in college, and it was super boring. And in one particular class we had to all be watching our computer screens and watch some random presentation. And instead we found a website that had Photoshopped a whole bunch of movie posters with the honest title of what that would be, based on what the poster looked like. And we almost got kicked out of class, we were laughing so fucking hard. I

don't even remember what most of the titles were. But when I just need to feel good, I think about that. Just the pure, giddy, ridiculous glee that I could share with somebody. And I don't get to make any new memories like that with him. But nobody can take that away from me, and nobody can take away those moments that all of you had with him as well."

Rev: Tass glances to his right at the closed casket, then takes a deep breath and steps from behind the podium. We recognize many of the faces in attendance as he walks past, headed to his seat. Margaret and Everett sitting near the front, the rest of the Founders filling the seats behind them. Jeff and Eddie sitting near Lindsay and the others from the lab. There are friends and family, only a handful of which Tass recognizes. And he spots a small webcam in the back. And thinks of those watching from a distance: Jingles, Anastacia, the crew of the Eye of Ra, as he retakes his seat.

We then find ourselves outside across the street, in a small, familiar looking graveyard. It is the graveyard where Dr. White had originally been buried, and where Tass had lost his life once. We see Tass and Jake, Rev, TJ's father, Everett, and Christine, carrying the casket across the street and to the gravesite. They lay it down onto the bars. Jake steps forward, and looks over the small gathering of people.

Jake: I step up to deliver the prayer that I'm used to giving when we lose people. And I think it occurs to me -- one, that I don't really pray to The Defender anymore, and two -- there's nothing left to look after in the next life. So I think I just kind of change directions and address it more to the people that are there: "Watch over him in the next life, watch over those he leaves behind, keep the world a better place as he left it."

Rev: And it is lowered into the ground. The crowd starts to disperse and head back towards the church and into the basement. Inside the basement, we see TJ's mother and father standing, talking to Everett in his dress blues. He speaks a few words to them, and TJ's father extends his hand and shakes it, and Everett snaps a clean salute and walks away.

Time passes pretty quickly. A half hour, an hour, two hours, and the basement becomes empty, except for Tass and Jake. After straightening up a couple of things, they head back over to the cemetery and stand, looking down at the grave with its freshly packed

earth. And you both hear the sound of boots on gravel, and another figure walks up and stands beside them.

Rev: DAMIEN O'DOYLE: Sad to see him go. Wish I could have been here this afternoon, but most people don't take too kindly to, uh ... Well, just me in general.

Rev: And you turn to look at the voice, and it is a gray-skinned man with a black leather jacket, jeans, and boots.

Tass: "Fair. Thanks for coming."

Rev: DAMIEN O'DOYLE: How are the two of you holding up?

Tass: I think I kind of blatantly ignore the question. "You know, you're one of the first people I thought of when it happened."

Rev: DAMIEN O'DOYLE: Oh, yeah?

Tass: "Yeah. Thought maybe there's a chance to do what y'all did for me."

Rev: DAMIEN O'DOYLE: Yeah. I think whatever happened to TJ, it wasn't something that there was someone like Lana, who saw it coming twenty years ago.

Tass: "Yeah, no shit. How stuff going with you? How's your, uh ... How's your project?"

Rev: DAMIEN O'DOYLE: It's kinda halted, every now and then. Gotta ... Well, you understand. Gotta keep working. Can't always work on your pet project.

Tass: [Sighs] "Yeah."

Rev: DAMIEN O'DOYLE: TJ, uh ... Did me a solid quite a while ago, and I still owed him one. So I guess it passes to you two.

Rev: And he hands you another one of those coins.

Tass: I'll take it. "I know this is just sort of how you work, but for what it's worth, thanks."

Rev: DAMIEN O'DOYLE: There aren't a whole lot of people in the world who can look past what they see on the outside of old Damien, give him a first or second chance. So when I encounter people like that, it's nice to check in, time to time.

Rev: And he turns and starts to walk out of the graveyard towards his car parked on the street.

Tass: "I don't know about you, man, but I really ... I really feel like I need to be working right now, you know what I mean?"

Jake: I think it occurs to me for the first time, like, I haven't even thought about what comes next, until right now. I hadn't thought about whether it was time to go back to work or not. So I just kind of shrug. "Sure."

Rev: And you both turn and walk out of the graveyard.

SFX: CRITSHOW STINGER

Rev: All right, so we did not do this at the end of Season Two. But it is, in fact, time for end of session experience.

Tass: Oh, yeah.

Rev: Did you conclude the current mystery?

Tass: We did. We had a goal. And one way or another, we got it done.

Rev: Absolutely. Question two -- might skip. Might just slide on past that one ...

Jake: [Laughs]

Tass: Oof.

Jake: I mean, broadly speaking, we saved many people from certain death or worse, by eliminating the god of death.

Rev: Yeah, that's true. Probably going to call that one a draw.

Tass: [Laughs] All right.

Jake: Probably just put a slash through that one.

Rev: Yeah. Did we learn something new and important about the world?

Jake: We learned that destroying a god, like, requires an absolute sacrifice. Like, we didn't know that that was coming.

Rev: And did we learn something new and important about one of the hunters? I mean, we learned that Jake is ready to cross that line.

Tass: That is true.

Rev: All right. So everybody gets two points of experience. Does anybody level up?

Tass: Nope, not quite there.

Jake: I mean, actually, I have a new playbook.

Rev: That's right. You have gotten your divinity back. So let's talk about your ... Not new, but your revised playbook.

Jake: Yes. I have joined the ranks of The Executioner. So my stats have shifted around a little bit. -1 Charm, 0 Cool, +1 Sharp, +2 Tough, and +1 Weird. I am keeping Angel Wings. I am taking Smite again. I haven't had that in a while, but I imagine that this god being all about just retribution, that's probably what matters most, is being able to put them down and put them down for good. So the weapon is the flaming sword. As with all Divine weapons, it does 3-harm. It is hand, fire, and holy. And I get my divine armor, which now has a different look, but that is just 1-armor, holy. I'm taking What I Need, When I Need It -- I'm getting my pocket dimension back. Because I feel like a sword ... [Laughs] Is more essential to conceal than any other weapon.

Rev: Especially a flaming sword.

Jake: Yeah. My mission has changed. Rather than protecting another hunter who has an important role to play, I am now here to fight the schemes of an adversary. I think maybe the biggest change though, is that I am switching up my Weird move. I am going to take Use Magic, at this point. I have been, you know, in-character studying some magic and learning how to apply it in pretty specific situations up to this point. But we have lost our Weird Science, and our spell caster has been kind of downgraded, and Use Magic kind of covers the base of what No Limits does, anyway. So I think as part of this switch, the new god kind of gave me an upgrade: just a better comprehension of magic and its application and uses, so that I can expand how I use it.

SFX: CRITSHOW STINGER

Rev: So here the two of you stand inside of Margaret's office at the IPT, and she is rifling through a couple of papers.

Rev: MARGARET: So, do you have any idea what's next?

Tass: "Yeah, we have sort of a lead on something to possibly find some information on Nash. It requires another portal jump, though. So I think we're going to maybe take a little time on this one, and see if we can get our ducks in a row before we go through another one."

Rev: MARGARET: Well, if everything works the way that you've described to us, when you all come back, it's like we never missed you. And so far, Anastacia and Everett have been doing a pretty good job of picking up the slack, with the two of you gone.

Tass: "That's awesome."

Rev: And at this point, Everett walks in and smiles at both of you.

Rev: EVERETT: How you holding up?

Tass: I give him a shrug.

Rev: EVERETT: Ayuh. I took some time and spoke to his parents, and ... [Sighs] Gave them a message I've had to deliver more times that I'd like to say, but ... Sacrifice, hero, can't really say why ... All things considered, they took it pretty well.

Tass: "Good. How's everything going with you guys? Is there anything you need help with, while we're here?"

Rev: EVERETT: No, there's not a whole lot right now that we're pursuing. We're just taking calls as they come in, going around, checking on things. You know Nash, whatever's going on with him and his group, they're a might quiet. It seems like they never make noise until they're right in front of you. Anastacia, she thought she might have a couple of leads on some of his old bases and stuff. But by the time we got there, go to check them out, there's nothing but husks. At some point, he must have figured out that she was inside of his organization.

Tass: "Yeah. I'll bet hitting his sub gave him a little heads up on some of that. If we found him there, I bet he did a complete rescrumble of everywhere else he's got."

Rev: EVERETT: Ayuh. What she said to me, that seemed to be his home away from home. Didn't imagine anybody'd ever find it.

Tass: "Speaking of which, that's something that's been in the back of my mind for a while. Don't we have some dirt or whatever, from where he's from?:

Rev: EVERETT: Oh, yeah. TJ gave it to the boys down in the lab before you took off one of those times. You might want to go down and check with them, see if they've got anything on it.

Tass: "Yeah, that's a good call. I don't know that it'll do a ton for us, but ... Every lead, right?"

Rev: EVERETT: Ayuh.

Tass: "Well, I'm not sure which thing yet, but we're gonna ... We're gonna look through a few things and and see what a better approach is for what we have in mind. So, you

know, if you guys just need anything while we're still here, let us know. We'll definitely give you a heads up before we hop back through something."

Rev: MARGARET: All right. Well, you let us know if there's anything in particular you need,

Tass: Shake their hands and, yeah, head out.

Jake: Same.

Tass: "What do we think, man?"

Jake: "What do you mean?"

Tass: "I don't know. It's just ... This seems big. If this is some sort of thing he's protecting through there ..." [Chuckles] "We've just, in some cases, gotten very lucky -- in some, kind of lucky -- with these jumps. Like, what can we do to get a heads up on whatever this is that we're gonna go into next?"

Jake: "You mean like how do we create an advantage for ourselves going in?"

Tass: "Yeah."

Jake: "I don't know. I mean, without, like, being there, we can't really change the circumstances of wherever we're going. We might be able to deal some kind of blow on this side that he has to deal with while we're gone? You know, to at least tie up some resources or something?"

Tass: "Yeah. I just wish there was a better way to know what the next place is, you know? Is at another place like what we just came from -- just that little change, but things are very similar. Different versions of ourselves. We know a lot of people we can make deals with that work in information. Does that translate to information about other universes?"

Jake: "I mean, theoretically, there is a Yaga in every universe, and they sort of have that awareness of each other. So ..."

Tass: [Sighs] "Yeah, this one just doesn't super love us."

Jake: "Well, I mean, we need to go talk to her regardless, to tell her everything that's ... You know, assuming she doesn't already know everything that's happened, we should tell her. And frankly, I would love to maybe rub it in her face a little bit that we took out Koschei."

Tass: "Well ..." I kind of wilt at that. "Yeah, OK, you're right. That's the most direct link, I think."

Jake: "Well, let's go talk to the lab folk first, see if they've got anything useful, and then I can just pop us over there."

Tass: "OK." And I think we head down to the lab.

Rev: All right. So the two of you head down into the lab. It is just after lunchtime. So all of the folks down in the lab -- Lindsay, and of course, the head of the lab -- are all there working. And he turns and sees you, and he waves.

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: How are you all doing? Doing pretty good?

Tass: "All things considered, we're OK."

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: Yeah, I mean ... Boy, he really contributed to the things that we did down here. He would come sometimes at night and we would work on things and talk about the ideas of, oh ... a Giant mech Statue of Liberty. Oh, the things we were going to create together.

Jake: "Hey, have you figured anything out about that dirt that we left with you a while ago?"

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: Yes. Yes. In fact, we've got it in TJ's locker over here.

Rev: And he goes over to the wall and there's a group of lockers, and one of them has TJ's name, and he opens it up. And inside are just a couple of random things. And he pulls out a Petri dish that has got some dirt layered along the bottom.

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: Yes, we discovered that this actually comes from Canterbury.

Jake: "Canterbury like Chaucer's?"

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: Yeah. Over in merry old England.

Tass: "OK. That's awesome. That's amazing."

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: Is there any particular reason that you're ... The dirt, where it's from, how that is helpful?

Tass: "Yes."

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: Good. Well, there you go. Canterbury.

Jake: "I mean, boy, if we really wanted to get dark, we could, like, track down his family through now. And I don't know if he would care -- maybe leverage them against him. Or maybe something to do with their blood, his blood? Magic? Ritual? Find, bind, destroy? I don't know. I'm just spit balling. Magic's new to me, shut up."

Tass: [Laughs] I was on board with a lot of that. "Yeah. No, I think that's good. It's something we can look into. But I don't know that it'll give us anything solid, but ... So thank you, guys. I appreciate you. You're awesome. I can't fathom all the crazy stuff you guys do. It just never ceases to amaze me. Thank you so much."

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: Of course.

Jake: Did I know this locker existed? Did I know TJ had a locker in the lab?

Rev: No. You knew he spent time down here. But yeah, you didn't know that he had a work station here.

Jake: Yeah. I want to see what's in there.

Rev: Yeah. You open it up. And there's a notepad that has the grid paper inside of it, and you see the beginning sketches of exactly what the head scientist here was talking

about: a way to mechanize the Statue of Liberty. They were deciding where joints would need to go, how to ignite the torch, ala Ghostbusters II.

Tass: [Laughs]

Rev: There are some photos taped up on the side of the locker, like in high school. There's one actually of the three of you, after that first mission. There's also some pictures of his family, as well as a couple of newspaper clippings from times where things you guys had done had popped up in the news. For example, with the "Superhero Fights Giant Lizard Monster." There's also the dented Altoids tin inside of here, as well as a handful of change.

Jake: Like, just coin change?

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: I want to look at it and see if there seems to be any significance to it.

Rev: You notice that it is from all different places. Like, there is no coin that is the same currency.

Jake: They're not like all places we've been to or anything, are they?

Rev: They're not.

Tass: "Hey, do you know what he was doing with these coins?"

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: Oh. Oh, yeah. He was trying to come up with a thing like ... Money that, wherever you took it, would look like the money from that place.

Tass: "Oh, that's so cool."

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: So these are actually all washers.

Tass: [Chuckles] "Oh, my god."

Jake: "Huh." I'm going to scoop them into the Altoids tin, and put them in my little pocket dimension.

Rev: All right. Actually, when you open the Altoids tin, you see that there are three tiny pills inside of it.

Jake: "What are -- what are these?"

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: Oh, yes. We were working on this right before you all went into the portal. He was trying to find a way to condense memories. And so my understanding is that if you were to take one of these pills, you'd know everything that he knew. And, and ... Uh, just a second.

Rev: He actually snatches the notebook out of your hand and starts to flip through it. And towards the end, there's a bunch of scribbles. And what he had written down was that he thought if you could go to a different world and have these pills, if you could feed one to someone, it would convince them your story was true, because they would now have your memories. It doesn't overwrite their memories, it just lets them know that the things you have said are true.

Jake: "How ... Did he manufacture these? Did you manufacture these?"

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: He did. He was working on a couple of machines, and ... I just don't know how he does some things, I'll be honest. He would aim one thing at another and yell, "Science!"

Jake: [Laughs]

Rev: IPT SCIENTIST: And then something would be there. It defies most of the logics that I know.

Tass: "Yeah, we saw a lot of that, too."

Jake: Is there anything else visible in this locker?

Rev: There's not.

Jake: I'm gonna, like, paw around in there, looking for like a secret switch or a button or something. I've seen TV, and it seems like the kind of shit TJ would do, to have like a hidden compartment,

Tass: I'm gonna taste one of the pictures,

Jake: [Laughs] Tastes just like us.

All: [Laugh]

Tass: [Gags]

Rev: You wish you hadn't licked that picture of Jake's foot at the beach first.

Um, you know what? Roll Luck. Let's see if TJ stashed something else in a hidden compartment.

Jake: Seven.

Rev: You do find a hidden compartment, but there isn't anything in it.

Jake: [Sighs]

Rev: Oh, god. If I suddenly had to come up with some other crazy invention ...

Tass: [Laughs] You would have hated that.

Rev: I had kind of polled TJ on like, oh, what kind of things would you want to create? And so this is where this idea came from.

Tass: How am I not surprised by any of this? I'm just not. And yet am. Have you ever been to Lady Liberty?

Jake: I have not.

Tass: I just want to see if he went over and started any work on that.

Jake: [Laughs] When he took his sabbatical? That's where he secretly went off to. "These are really cool, and really good ideas."

Tass: "And the pills would fit in the capsule, right?"

Jake: "Oh, yeah. And I mean, so would the coins."

Tass: "That's so cool."

Jake: "Man, I wish we had a way to make more of them. You know? I'm not sure what good like a handful of coins will be most places. But I don't know. I guess there's no way of knowing until we get there, as with everything."

Tass: "Yeah, true."

Rev: Once you arrive in the newest Powered by the Apocalypse game: Subway World. Where you just ride an endless stream of subways

Jake: While eating --

Rev: You thought, for a minute, I meant -- yeah.

Jake: While eating sandwiches on stinky bread,

All: [Laugh]

Tass: I was about to argue with that, but ...

Jake: It's a stink that I like.

Tass: Yeah. [Laughs]

Jake: But still. Like, it's pervasive.

Tass: It is. It is.

Rev: Their onion smell like dirty feet.

Jake: I don't eat their onions, so ... Fortunately, I don't have to know.

Rev: I just -- the whole reason I know that is cause I remember being in high school, and a friend of mine who was in the theatre department, she worked at Subway. And she would always come to rehearsal afterwards, and she would always smell like dirty feet. And she was so upset about it. And she was like, "No, it's the onions. The onions in that place, they smell gross. And it gets on me, and I can't get the smell off."

Jake: Is it possible that she was lying to you, and she just smelled bad?

Rev: No, because I was around her at other times in the day, and she didn't smell like dirty feet.

Jake: [Laughs] OK.

Rev: I mean, I guess unless it was like an end of the day thing.

Jake: Maybe her feet got real stinky while she did her long shift at Subway.

Rev: While she ... It's possible.

Tass: Was she cutting the fucking onions with her feet? With her toes?

Rev: I wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt.

Jake: I just imagined, like, stomping grapes for wine. But instead of just the onions in a bucket, in the back room of a Subway.

Rev: [Sighs] I'm crying for two reasons ...

All: [Laugh]

Tass: I think it's pretty safe to say we gather all of this stuff up.

Jake: Yeah. I think all of this stuff lives in the pocket dimension now. Like, if for no other reason than it's too important to me to leave anywhere else.

Rev: All right. So where to now?

Jake: Yaga's place.

Rev: Yeah. So where in the woods do you want to teleport to?

Jake: I feel like my best bet is where, like, the house belonged. Like, where it ultimately settled, so that we could go into the basement.

Rev: Yeah. With the fence.

Jake: Yeah. To kind of outside the front door, if the house is there in that spot.

Rev: This is not a under pressure situation, so you don't need to roll this one. The two of you, standing outside of the IPT, vanish in a burst of flames, and appear in the woods in Russia. In front of you as you appear, it is dark and the woods are very noisy. You can hear the howl of a wolf, and the buzzing of many insects. And in front of you is the fence of spikes with skulls on top, and the house is nestled into its proper position.

Tass: "If we have to chase down this fucking chicken house again, I'm gonna lose my mind."

Jake: "Do you think we should just, like, announce ourselves loudly, right now?"

Tass: "I mean, last time we did that, it got up and ran. But, I don't know."

Jake: I will walk towards the front door, and -- oh, and speak the magic code.

Rev: Yes.

Tass: Oh, yeah.

Rev: Because as you approach, there is no door. Just the flat wall.

Jake: "Turn your back to the forest, your front to me."

Rev: And the door appears and clicks open and swings in.

Jake: "Baba Yaga? It's Jake and Tass. May we come in?"

Rev: BABA YAGA: Yes. Do come in.

Jake: I nudge Tas in first.

Tass: "OK ..."

Rev: And the two of you walk in, and for the first time, you both see something you had not seen previously. You see all the furniture and the giant stove, but it seems to be covered with like a drop cloth. There is just something draped over all the furniture, the table, around the stove. And as you step in, this mop of gray, scraggly hair on top of the chimney shifts and looks up at you, and it's Baba's face. And you realize it is her body spread out, as TJ had described seeing before. And it starts to pull slowly in, slinking across the furniture and the floor.

Rev: BABA YAGA: Oh, just getting warm. How are you both doing?

Tass: "Is that comfortable?"

Rev: BABA YAGA: Oh, yes. It is the best way to keep warm and really feel connected with your space.

Jake: I think I'm actually, like, super ... Like, I wish I could do that. Like, I'm like feeling how tight my back feels. I'm like, oh god, I wish I could just taffy out all over everything.

Rev: BABA YAGA: When I lay around the house, I lay around the house.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: And she pulls herself completely together, and starts to walk over towards a rocking chair and sits down. There is a kettle boiling on the stove.

Rev: BABA YAGA: In lack of TJ's presence, I don't suppose one of you wants to pour the tea?

Tass: "Yeah, I gotcha."

Rev: As you hand her the tea, she looks at you for a long moment, and then a smile spreads across her face and her sharp metal teeth glint in the firelight of the stove.

Rev: BABA YAGA: You have done great things in other places. I do not know the extent, for I do not want to pry, as I would not want them to pry into me. But I sense changes rippling.

Tass: "Good changes?"

Rev: BABA YAGA: That is not seen. Only changes, and I feel less weight.

Tass: "I'm glad to hear that."

Rev: BABA YAGA: No one comes to my cottage without desiring something. What is it that you need?

Tass: "Yeah, I guess the thing that you just said you don't want to do seems to be the thing that we want to ask you to do. So, I don't know that we can. I don't want to compromise what you're willing to do and not willing to do."

Rev: BABA YAGA: Oh. What would you need? What would you desire from my knowledge? I must, in all things, attempt to stay neutral. But, there are surface thoughts. There is shared common knowledge we all have of one another, that I do not believe would be imbalancing the scales, if I were to share it.

Tass: "Oh. Yeah, there's just a world that we want to go to. We've gone through to a few, obviously, as you know. But it's been kind of a shock and/or surprise every time we go

through. We're just really hoping for the advantage of at least knowing what hot water we're jumping into."

Rev: BABA YAGA: I see. And where are you going?

Jake: "I have the number. I don't know if to you they're, like, numbered the way they are for our system. But it's 8037?"

Rev: BABA YAGA: No.

Jake: "It's where the Alkali Corporation is."

Rev: BABA YAGA: OH ...

Rev: And her eyes roll back a little bit, and start to twitch back and forth.

Rev: BABA YAGA: Ah, yes. There are a number of those in my thoughts when I reach out, but only one that seems like it might be big enough to be important. But as I said, neutral in all things. For this information, you must, as before, do something for me.

Tass: "Fair's fair. What do you need?"

Rev: BABA YAGA: At the far edge of the woods, far to the south -- much farther than you have walked before, for my land will stretch and grow as necessitates -- there is an old burned down cottage and a rosebush. I need what is buried under that rosebush. It once was mine, and was taken. It is time for it to return home.

Tass: "That doesn't seem like much of a riddle."

Rev: BABA YAGA: It is not. It is simply a task.

Tass: "What took what was buried?"

Rev: BABA YAGA: Someone else who came here seeking my advice on how to deal with a problem. Her problem is long dealt with. Her life, long over.

Jake: "On a scale from one to ten, how lethal is whatever we're going to encounter under the rosebush?"

Rev: BABA YAGA: Very.

Jake: "Well, at least we know that going in."

Tass: "Imma just guess this isn't a thing you want us to set free?"

Jake: [Laughs]

Rev: BABA YAGA: I would have it returned to me, so that it does not find its way into the wrong hands. And, so that my decor will be complete again.

Jake: I'm like looking around the cabin, seeing if there's like, you know, like a spot on the wall where a cuckoo clock visibly used to be.

Tass: [Laughs]

Rev: And as you start to scan around and look, your eye actually falls out the open door. And on the fence, you can see, just on the left side when you walk in, that one of the bones is missing a skull. That they all have skulls lining the front, except for one is empty.

Jake: OK. "I mean, this sounds like a deal to me."

Tass: "Yeah, I agree."

Rev: BABA YAGA: Very well. I will have your answer when you return.

Tass: "All right. No time like the present."

Jake: All right. We will begin our trek.

Rev: It's a strange walk. It's quiet. All the sounds of the animals, all the sounds of the insects, go away. The wind rustles on occasion, but less and less the further you walk. And nothing seems to have memorable characteristics to it. If you were to try to mark a

tree so you could come back to it, a collection of rocks ... Once you're past it, you don't quite have a sense of what it looked like. And I think at this point, as you are walking, if you've got a beginning of mystery move, now would be the time to use it.

Tass: Yeah, I would absolutely hit my Destiny's Plaything. That is a nine. So that is a vague hint about the coming mystery.

Rev: So as the two of you walk, Tass, you get this brief vision of a skull. And it looks exactly like the other skulls that are on the fence around Yaga's house, except that it's got these two burning coals where the eyes are. And you see it moving through space, and then it's sat down on a pile of other what look like strange artifacts. And then you're back, walking again.

Tass: [Shudders] "Oh, god."

Jake: "Did you have a vision?"

Tass: "Yep. I saw this skull. It had these embers or coals or something burning in its eyes. And it was moving through space. I get the feeling that it was maybe being carried? I guess I don't know. But it was set down on to a pile of other stuff. I don't know, artifacts or items, or ... I couldn't tell. I don't know. I can't make heads or tails of it. But makes me wonder if somebody's there, which wouldn't be a surprise.

Rev: And the two of you walk, and you walk. And you don't find yourself tired, but you realize, after some stretch of time has passed, that the sun is starting to rise. And as the sun rises, you do see the bones of this burned out cottage at the end of the clearing in front of you.

Tass: "Man, was that whole thing as trippy to you as it was to me?"

Jake: "Yeah. Do you think the knights are still out here? Do you think that they just, like, shifted over right then when the sun came up?"

Tass: "I guess I don't know."

Jake: "I mean, hopefully we don't have to encounter them. I'm just curious. They're probably still out here." Does it seem -- I mean, is there any movement in or around the cottage? Or any noise, or anything? Like it's burnt out, but does it seem still in use, in any capacity?

Rev: Yeah. You head over to the cottage and start to look around. You don't have any sense of any movement. There's a thick layer of old ash, as well as moss and leaves inside. You do find pieces of charred bones. I think, glancing around, you can see some very, very dark burns in the wood. It seems like there are three distinct places where very hot fires burned.

Tass: Can I open my Sight and see if there's anything more here, invisible or spirit related?

Rev: Yeah, you do. You open up your Sight and you look around. The place where those dark spots are burned into the floor have a little bit of magic to them, but the rest of this place seems clean and clear.

Tass: "Nothing too intense on the old invisible radar. Er -- that's not a -- that's not right, is it?"

Jake: "No, that's a cool name. I like it."

Tass: "OK. Cool, cool, cool. Maybe magic started the fires? Otherwise, just looks like a shitty old building."

Jake: I would like to try something. I would like to Use Magic to view another time.

Rev: Yeah. Roll Use Magic.

Jake: Why ...

Tass: Oh, no.

Jake: That's a four

Rev: The two of you are standing there, and Jake opens up his magic to try to create a vision from the past. And the two of you are suddenly standing in this cottage, and it is completely built around you. And there's a third person standing there with you, and they're talking to you, but it seems like gibberish. And then the door opens, and there's a young woman -- fourteen, fifteen years old -- and she is carrying this skull at the end of a stick, with its glowing eyes. And you're not able to stop yourself. You all turn and you look at it. And as you make eye contact with it, you burst into flames. And this pain is agony. You scream, you fall to the ground, you feel the heat rising through your body, the metal starting to bubble on your armor ... And then you're both laying on the floor in the old burned out cottage, underneath the rising sun.

Tass: "What the hell, dude?"

Jake: "I think, technically, it worked."

Tass: "Kinda. Good god ..."

Jake: Being sprawled out on the ground and very close to those blackened spots on the floor, do they look like footprints?

Rev: No. They do look like the spots where three people would have been standing when they burst into flames.

Jake: Neato. "All right." As I drag myself back to my feet. "If it's the skull, don't look in its eyes. Yeah?"

Tass: "Yep."

Jake: "That seems like it."

Tass: "Yep."

Jake: "Let's go dig up a rosebush, baby."

Tass: I'm gonna shamle out of here, I guess, and look around to see if there's a rosebush.

Rev: Directly behind the house is a fairly large rosebush. It's got two dozen beautiful roses blooming on it.

Tass: "I suppose we just start digging until we find something."

Jake: "Yeah. Like, should we blindfold ourselves? So that we don't, like, accidentally dig this thing up and look it in its eyes?"

Tass: "I mean, maybe once we find something. I mean if we, you know, clink down and get an idea that something's there. I can't imagine the shovel full that would just open its eyes, right?"

Jake: "I mean, do you want to make assumptions? Or do you wanna catch fire? Like what --"

Rev: [Laughs]

Jake: "You felt that, right? This isn't something I want to be cavalier about."

Tass: "OK. You and your logic and your steps and safety ... Do we do that? Do we just blindfold ourselves and dig till we feel a clink of something?"

Jake: "Yeah. I mean, we know it's under the bush. That's a relatively small area to have to dig in. I think we'll be OK."

Tass: "OK, yeah. All right."

Jake: "What are we gonna dig with?"

Tass: "Can't you teleport to a ..."

Jake: "Yeah, I'll go to an Ace Hardware. I'll be right back."

Rev: [Laughs] Yeah. You teleport to your local hardware store of choice. You know, the one Jake always shops at. And you buy two shovels, and you teleport back.

Jake: OK. I'm gonna take off my crimson sash that came with my fancy new armor and tie it around my eyes. Like, once I break dirt and know kind of where I'm going, tie that around my eyes and start digging.

Rev: OK.

Tass: I guess I take off my tie and use that as a blindfold.

Rev: Ah, someone's seen 50 Shades of Gray.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: Yeah. So you both blindfold yourselves and start to dig. Why don't you both roll Act Under Pressure?

Jake: I got an eight.

Tass: I got a nine.

Rev: So you can take a little damage from what's about to happen. You can get out of the way, but drop something. Or, you're gonna make a bunch of noise as it happens. I know that I haven't described what's happening, but it's because you're both blindfolded.

Jake: Can I ask ... Like, the little bit of damage is not what happened to us in the vision, right? Like, it's not -- that's not a little bit of damage.

Rev: Correct. That is not a little bit of damage, yeah.

Jake: OK.

Rev: Immolation is ...

Jake: [Laughs] Is pretty -- a pretty lot.

Rev: More than 1 armor-defeating, I'm sure.

Jake: I'll take the little bit of damage then.

Tass: I think I like the thought of making noise.

Rev: OK. So as you both dig up this rosebush, there is a crumbling sound. And Jake, you feel yourself fall forward and down. Tass, you feel this earth starting to give way. And you stagger backwards and you let out a scream as your shovel clangs against a tree. Jake, you fall about ten feet and hit the ground. You take 1 point of damage, armor-defeating, as you land on a bunch of rocks.

Jake: So it feels like we dug through the ceiling of something?

Rev: It does.

Jake: I'm so scared to take the blindfold off, now.

Rev: [Laughs]

Jake: I'm going to listen, very carefully.

Rev: Tass, what are you doing?

Tass: I'm getting to my feet, and I have to look. I have to look. I think I just tug the tie down just a little bit under one eye, to see what we just did.

Rev: Yeah. You peek out, and you see that the rosebush is gone. And there is a hole about five feet around that Jake has just fallen through.

Tass: "Shit. Jake, are you OK? Hello? Jake?"

Rev: Jake, roll Read a Bad Situation. -1, because you're blindfolded.

Jake: [Laughs] But I'm listening so carefully!

Rev: But you are only listening. That's fair. Yeah, just roll Read a Bad Situation. You can only ask --

Jake: Oh, thirteen!

Rev: Hearing-based questions.

Tass: [Laughs]

Rev: All right. You get a hold 3.

Jake: Are there any dangers we haven't noticed?

Rev: You hear, pretty far away to your right, as you lay on the ground blindfolded, the sound of something running on four legs. But it's getting quieter.

Jake: Oh. Knowing that I don't hear anything close to me, I will take the blindfold off.

Rev: So you pull down your blindfold, and you are inside of a tunnel. And you can see that it goes to your left and to your right. And this creeping feeling of déjà vu sinks in, because ... It's been a while now, but you have been in a tunnel like this before. You see the claw marks on the walls, and the smell of death fills this place. You've fallen through the earth, into a ghoulish tunnel.

SFX: OUTRO MUSIC

Carolyn: The Critshow is a Critshow Studios production, edited and produced by Brandon Wentz, with music by Jake Pierle. You can find more information about us at thecritshowpodcast.com To keep up to date with upcoming live shows, contests, and other special events, follow us at The Critshow on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. For even more weekly content, join us at Patreon.com/TheCritshow.