

Archives and Artifacts (S4, E9)

SFX:

INTRO MUSIC

Rev: Hey, everybody. Rev here. In lieu of an introduction this week, I'm just going to say hello. We are all recovering from Gen Con. We've got some Gen Con stories to tell, but we will do that in the intro next week. So I decided to just grab this intro, just myself and Harvey, as we prep to play a game of For the Queen with our Chosen who is visiting us this month. Just a reminder, if you are interested in getting in on the swag or the T-shirt tier, this is the month to sign up for that over at Patreon.com/TheCritshow. Enjoy the episode. It's time to let the recap roll.

SFX:

RECAP MUSIC

Rev: On the stool is a glass jar with a head in it, and sitting in the other chair is a younger man — dark skin, dark hair.

Rev: KESTER: My name is Kester Danholm, and my friend here in the jar is Tiresias.

Kim: "What's our next move here?"

Rev: STROHM: We have had an incident lately where our defenses were lessened, and so I'm not sure if it means that we shore up and try to focus on strengthening things here, or if we show force outward and make it so that no one has the opportunity to take pokes at our defenses until they are re-established. I thought I would take this opportunity to let Tiresias give us an answer. We were just about to start, but you're more than welcome to join us if you'd like.

Kim: "Oh, absolutely. I'd love to watch him work."

Rev: Kester focuses. And the words that come out of Tiresias's mouth are again in Kester's voice.

Rev: KESTER'S VOICE: Let go of us. See for yourself, Tiresias.

Rev: And those words cause his eyes to glow even brighter. His mouth opens in an enormous yawn.

Rev: TIRESIAS: Regardless of your decision to go to ground or lash out, the inevitable is coming. It will all crumble around you. All you have built will cease to be. But from the ashes of that destruction, something stronger will be born. Though the cost will be your soul.

SFX: RECAP MUSIC FADES

Rev: As Tiresias's words finish echoing through all of your heads, his eyes begin to wander again. And Kester steps closer, and you see Tiresias's eyes lock on to Kester. Strohm looks around the table for a moment, and you can see that there is rage smoldering just beneath the surface. And she stands and straightens her dress, turns, and walks up the stairs.

Kim: I look at Kester and Tiresias. "I assume that the two of you can find your way out?"

Rev: KESTER: We're staying here for the time being. She thought it would be best, because of what's going on in the building.

Kim: "Fantastic. Make yourselves at home." And I'm gonna follow Strohm up the stairs.

Rev: As you come up the stairs, she has passed into the door that leads into her private quarters.

Kim: I want to gather up the food and the skincare — all of the treats that I had brought — and try to carry them into Strohm's room.

Rev: Yeah. As you go to pass into the doorway that leads into her private quarters, you hit a barrier — which is not normally the case.

Kim: "Strohm!"

Rev: You hear the sound of some things shattering.

Kim: "That shit really freaked me out too. I'd love to talk to you about it."

Rev: You can hear that her voice is pinched.

Rev: STROHM: Yes, I'm just going to lay down for a little bit. I think we'll talk about it in the morning.

Kim: "OK. I have some things here for you. Uh ... We'll talk in the morning." And I'll set down the stuff outside of her door.

Rev: And as you make your way back to the elevator, right before it closes, very softly, you hear ...

Rev: STROHM: Thank you.

Rev: Megan. You have been dropped off by Jake. What are you up to?

Megan: I am heading into the Fourth Presbyterian Church.

Rev: Inside, you see that there are a handful of people training. Kit is walking back and forth between a group of them, helping them with their stances as they are wielding stakes and mallets.

Megan: I think I'm walking quickly towards the back, kind of to that office area again. And I just let out like a quick whistle to get his attention, and then the 'follow me' motion.

Rev: Yeah. He does, without hesitation.

Megan: And I'll just lead him back into that office area. "Hey, how's it going?"

Rev: KIT: Good. Are you all right?

Megan: "Yeah. I got some information that I need to share with you, though. So you know how you said it seemed like these vampires were somehow tracking humans as humans?"

Rev: KIT: Yes.

Megan: "Turns out they are."

Rev: KIT: How?

Megan: "It's like a splinter cell, right? From New Canterbury? And they want to kind of do their own shit. But they broke into a museum and got blood from an old, like, corpse in a sarcophagus. I don't know any details. I don't know what this body was or why it would still have blood in it. But they have this blood and it lets them have, like, really heightened senses. So they are able to tell that we're human."

Rev: KIT: Oh.

Rev: And he sits down on one of the chairs.

Rev: KIT: That's not good.

Megan: "No. But that's the bad news. The good news is it wears off, and they only have a limited supply of it. So this isn't gonna go on forever. I mean, unless they figure out how to make more of this blood ... I don't know what it is. Actually, maybe this isn't good news."

Rev: KIT: Ok, so "bad news, maybe good news" situation?

Megan: "Yeah."

Rev: KIT: Feels like that's what we're usually working with.

Megan: "Yeah. So I don't know really what we can do about that? I mean, we can try and figure out where this came from, where they're keeping it, and get rid of their supply so they can't continue to do it. I don't know how much they got. Or we might be able to leak some information to New Canterbury that there's a splinter group, because they probably wouldn't like that. And maybe they can just handle it internally. Or maybe both. Maybe it wouldn't be good for all of New Canterbury to know about this super sense blood, but they could know about the break off group. Huh ..."

Rev: KIT: Seems like you've got a plan percolating.

Megan: "I'm just thinking if that would be the direction to take that would benefit us the most, you know? Get us what we need, without doing all of the work. I'm not quite sure where to start with that, though. Maybe getting more information on whatever this body was."

Rev: KIT: Yeah. You could try to figure out what the body was. Or, if they're a splinter cell, do they have like their own place? Like could we track them down and destroy the blood?

Megan: "Yeah. I think we should probably get our hands on this blood, if we can. Destroy it, take it, whatever. But I'm wondering if there's a way to get New Canterbury to take out the splinter group for us? You know, because from what I'm hearing, there's a lot of weird stuff going on within that group, anyway. Like, nobody is telling the higher ups what's going on because they don't, like, want to pass on bad news. And nobody, like, really knows who's in charge. It's kind of weird. For being such like a powerful group, they're pretty disorganized. So I don't know if whoever's in charge would want to squash that to keep this illusion of being a united front? But it might behoove us to not have to take out an entire splinter cell if we don't have to."

Rev: KIT: How do we stop them from getting the blood?

Megan: "Well, I think we'd probably have to get it first. If we could somehow sneak in and get it? And then get out, and then not have to go back and deal with them ourselves? Or maybe just go in and find out where it is, and get some information, and ... I don't know. Sorry, I should probably have more answers. I've just been feeling a little indecisive lately. Not quite sure in decision making, ever since I got back."

Rev: KIT: I, uh ... So what should I have everybody do?

Megan: "What would you do, if you were in my shoes? If you were leading The Red Line, what would you do?"

Rev: KIT: Uh ... I mean, if you're thinking about trying to sneak in and get the blood, maybe have everybody start training stealth skills? Or come up with a distraction that won't lead back to us?

Megan: "No, that's good. That's good. That's really good. I think maybe we can start with that. We should ... We should keep with this idea of buddy system. You know, like now that we know for sure that they're tracking us, just as we are. There's nothing that we can do, I think, to shield that. But if they are continuing to only attack people who are alone? Groups of two. Maybe even three, if possible? Switching up safe houses more often? I don't know how helpful that is? But yeah, I'll do a little more thinking on it before we actually make any moves. But I just wanted to get your opinion on what we should do, because you've been very helpful. And I've just ... I've got a lot of things I'm trying to keep track of, and I might need to just rely on you a little more right now, Kit, to help come up with some action plans. You are invaluable here, really."

Rev: KIT: Should we have safe houses? Is that — I don't know if that's better or worse, like to have everybody spread out more, or just bring everybody here. And this place is safe, but then we're all also in one location.

Megan: "Right. Maybe we just cut down on the number of houses that we're using. So there's safety in numbers, but we're not ... One number."

Rev: KIT: OK, yeah. I will see maybe what safe houses are most defensible and how many folks we have, and maybe try to pull people back into fewer places. That's what I wanted to mention to you, actually. We don't have any new people. Like the last almost week, no one new has shown up at The Bean.

Megan: "That's ... That's weird. How ... How many compared to usual would you say there's been, over the last several weeks? Do we have — do we have those numbers somewhere?" And I just start, like, rifling around on the desk.

Rev: Yeah. Yeah, and you're able to find the number of the new members that have joined. And it's no more than three a night, but it's always at least one a night. But you can see that in the last like five days, there haven't been anybody.

Megan: "This seems not good."

Rev: KIT: Yeah.

Megan: "We don't really know where they're coming from, but it's been pretty consistent, and at least more humans have been showing up. But with there being none, does that mean wherever they're coming from, something happened to that? Or if there's just nobody to bring in anymore? Is it just us?"

Rev: KIT: Oh, I hadn't really thought about that, that maybe Julie was the last human. I ... Huh.

Megan: "Yeah. OK. Well, I think let's assume ..."

Rev: He just lays down and cries. [Laughs]

Megan: [Laughs] "I think we've got to maybe work under that assumption. Assume that this is what we have to work with. This is what we have to defend. Hope that it's the other option, and I'll look into that. But yeah, let's pull everyone back as much as we can right now. Not all the way, but let's get a better handle on our numbers so we can really lay this out and see what we have."

Rev: KIT: Yeah, OK. And he nods to you and heads out of the room into his office.

Megan: OK. Um, I want to walk back out to the training area and just people watch and kind of see ... If this is what we have left, how's it looking?

Rev: I think that in this moment, you know that with the exception of you and Kit, the people here are the newest. And the folks that have the most amount of training and the most kills racked up, honestly, and the most saves, are the ones further out in the safe houses. So if you were to go by just what's in this room? You know, it's — this is The Sandlot.

Megan: Right.

Rev: But you know that there are others who are much more trained, much more capable, that can be pulled back into this location. But right now seems like will be at least pulled back to fewer locations.

Megan: Right. So if I can see how much more training the people here need, I'll just kind of, in the doorway, look at Kit. "Hey, so we're pulling people back into fewer safe houses. Let's get some of our more experienced — whoever you think would be the best trainers — to kind of ramp up what we've got going on here. Like you said, focusing a little more on stealth might not be a bad idea to cover. But I think all around, we're just gonna have to start pushing people a little harder."

Rev: KIT: Yeah, OK.

Megan: "I have to go look into some stuff — well, some more stuff now. But I'll be back soon."

Rev: KIT: OK. Yeah, I'll pull back to maybe three safe houses, and bring everybody else here?

Megan: "Yeah. All right. Sounds good."

Rev: KIT: OK.

Megan: "Thanks."

Rev: KIT: Yeah.

Megan: And I'll head out and start making my way back to the 606.

Rev: OK. And Jake, you were headed to the 606. You weren't headed back to the Rookery, correct?

Jake: Correct.

Rev: OK. So I think we find Jake and Grandpa Tincher down in the subterranean lair at the 606.

Jake: "All right. So here's what I've got in my head formulating as a plan, here. We know where the Ley Lines' artifact is. I now have a favor owed to me by The Lore Merchant, who kind of directs things and calls the shots in there. I'm thinking that we could get you in there if we frame it as you are some kind of part magic user, part technology wielder. I mean, what you are. You know. But like, as if you belong in our faction. That it's almost like having a guest lecturer in, you know? That we could swing you as, 'Oh hey, this is ... Made up name. These are the things he can do.' Maybe you demonstrate a thing, you know, that you've made? Or something, to curry favor. 'He would benefit from looking in our archives. I'd like to take him down there so we can pursue some research and then maybe we can collaborate with him.' What do you think of that?"

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: I see. Would it be something that I would need to generate a new identity? Or are we going to just make one up and hope that he's not aware of the other members of his group? Or am I a new found mage? Or ...

Jake: "I mean, if we could like do what you did for us, for you, that would be fantastic. How long does that take?"

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Not long. I have an identity I've been using, though they are not a mage per say, but it is something that I use when I go out into the world. I had paired myself up with Clan Ozymandias because I have a great deal of knowledge from the world beforehand, so that seemed to be helpful when I was trying to hide myself in public. I suppose I could shift it around, attach a different name to it, or ... Hmm ...

Jake: "I mean, The Lore Merchant is well studied, so I don't think we're going to benefit from just hoping he doesn't know his people. He knows his people. So yeah, I mean, probably generating the new identity is going to be our best bet."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Yes. All right. Give me just a little bit of time, and I think that I can make that work. And make some things that look magical — because I can't do magic.

Jake: "Right. But if we can maybe bring an item that you and I have kind of collaborated on. You know, make it seem like this is something you technomanced on your own, that might be enough."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Ah, yes.

Jake: "They shouldn't ask for an active demonstration. Because that's not really going to be how this process would work anyway, right? It would be you in a lab spending time."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Yes.

Jake: "Not just something you do on the fly. So, yes."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: OK. So with what we've got here ...

Rev: And he turns and looks around the subterranean lair.

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: And with what you can do, what could we make that would look like something I built could do it?

Jake: "Maybe we could build some sort of shielding device. Did you ever read up on what TJ made for us at Monument Circle?"

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Oh, yes.

Jake: "I've got the ability to generate a magical shield. I mean, usually it's kind of on a ... Like over an individual, or several individuals. But maybe we could collaborate to kind of recreate that effect. You know, magic and tech together."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: I see. So some kind of device that if I could make something like a ... Like a belt or something, that held the charge of the shield that you put into it, and then released it when I pushed a button. So it looked like I was generating it. But it's magic that you've preloaded into it. Like a .. Like a peanut brittle and the snakes.

Jake: "Yes. Yeah, exactly like that. It's like — it's like we're making a wand, but that anybody can use, you know?"

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Yes. All right. Yes. Give me just a little bit of time and I will see what I can cobble together.

Jake: "All right."

Rev: And he turns and heads back into his workshop to set to work.

Tass. Is there anything that you were doing during this time before you all meet back up at the 606 to talk about the Great Horse Escape?

Tass: I think what I might have been doing is actually heading like towards the outskirts of town and just testing the limits of my motorcycle. Just finding some stretches of road and seeing how fast I can go and how maneuverable I can get. And that's it.

Rev: OK. What does this look like?

Tass: Um ...

Jake: It's got two wheels.

All: [Laugh]

Tass: You beat me to it by a second. [Laughs] I think it's really just ramping up this motorcycle. And like the faster it goes, the more heat starts to pour off of it, the more flame starts to billow. And when I slow down and try to get more maneuverable, that's when it actually starts to leave little trails of fire and stuff. It's not really when I'm going fast that anything is left behind. It's when I'm starting to stunt a little bit that it leaves these greasy fire trails and such.

Rev: All right. So then if no one else has anything to do, I think we find ourselves back at the 606 later that evening, and you have all reconvened.

Megan: I think I picked up ingredients for the cookies on my way back. Because like I don't know if he's got like a kitchen space — but it's a lab. A kitchen's a lab, so I can make cookies there.

Rev: OK.

Tass: "So what's the plan? Is James in?"

Jake: "Yeah. He has got an identity kind of similar to what they provided for us. He's gonna tweak that a little bit so that we can really safely, you know, maneuver him about town. And then we're going to collab on an item to give this technomancer air off of him. So that, you know, we can kind of show not tell why he's valuable and why he belongs."

Tass: "OK. What do you got in mind?"

Jake: "I'm thinking something like the shield generator that we had at the Circle. I mean, that was basically all tech, but I've got a similar ability at this point, and I think that we can kinda — we can kinda fudge this, he and I together."

Tass: "Oh, that's good. I wonder if you could use that specifically to get close to the item. Like, 'Hey, this is a show of goodwill from this new guy. Here's this like technological aspect of shielding to keep this item safe for you, on top of whatever else you have.' Like ..."

Jake: "Oh."

Tass: "Just have this as a show of goodwill and we'll talk about the rest, blah blah blah."

Jake: "Yeah. Yeah, that's good. Maybe we could actually pitch them that device as like a redundancy. And just part of deploying that device is he's got to be able to get close to the item that we're shielding."

Tass: "Yeah."

Jake: "That's great. Good call."

Tass: "Thank you. Good call on the thing."

Jake: And we just — we just start high fiving over and over and over again. What's everybody else doing? [Laughs] "What's become of everybody else's day? Anything good?"

Megan: "Oh. Well, I went back to the church and I told them that the splinter cell from New Canterbury is using the sarcophagus blood to track humans. And they said that no more humans are showing up the Cloud Gate. So I kind of put out this idea that it's like, oh, maybe there are no more humans. So we are pulling everyone back to keep them safer, because I don't know what to do about like these vampires yet. I mean, we know now that Lana was bringing people to the Cloud Gate, and obviously she's being held up at the casino, then she's not doing that anymore."

Tass: "Yeah."

Jake: "Wow. So she was the only one. Nobody's just finding their way there?"

Megan: "Apparently, over the last like five days, there hasn't been anyone. And it's usually at least one. So that's very suspicious. So right now, I've just kind of got this idea floating out there that we should pull everyone back for safety. I don't know what to do about this splinter group. Like I said maybe we should break in and steal this blood that they have, because there's only a limited amount of it. So if they don't have it anymore, maybe we're good. But then I was like, well maybe New Canterbury would like to know about this, and they could take care of it for us. But I don't want them to get the blood. So I've got everyone just kind of doubled up on training more stealth and being deceptive, as well as fighting. But I don't know what to do with these people."

Tass: "Yeah. Just a side thought here, about this splinter group. I wonder if that's something that we can use down the line. Of, 'Hey, we'll take out this splinter group if you literally let us just hang out in the room with your item for a few minutes.' I don't know. Just very general thought there, but food for thought."

Megan: "Yeah. I mean, that would be great, if they're up for it. Because we don't know anything about their item, right? Like, we don't know what it is or where it is."

Tass: "Yeah, as far as I know."

Megan: "Interesting. I wonder how open they would be to that. I don't know anything about New Canterbury, other than they're not really communicating. So maybe that's also helpful. I wonder who would be in trouble? You know what I mean? Like with this splinter cell?"

Tass: "Right. Like who has the most pressure on them to deal with this?"

Megan: "Yeah. Like who let this happen?"

Jake: "I mean, Dr. Benson owes me one, so I could find that out and figure out if this is kind of a task we could undertake, with an understanding."

Megan: "That could be really good. You know, I'm thinking if Lana has been the one bringing all of these humans to the Cloud Gate and she's not able to anymore, where are they coming from? Are they safe wherever they were? Or are they in more danger, now that she's not there to bring them to us?"

Tass: "I have to imagine it's that one. I can't imagine Lana, in any timeline for any reason, pulling people into danger needlessly. But I guess we don't know."

Jake: "I mean, if they've got the ability to track humans now via their senses, there may be something to be said for those humans being more decentralized now, you know? If there's more of them in an area, it might be easier to pick up on them smell-wise, or something. So maybe, you know, despite the fact that they are alone, maybe being alone and spread out is a little bit better for some of them right now."

Megan: "But that's how they were getting killed. The ones who were alone were the ones being attacked. The ones that were in groups weren't."

Tass: "Yeah, I mean, it's a little of both. I mean, there's no super safety, but you're right. I think right now, that's absolutely correct. That they probably should all be banded together, because the splinter group is just a splinter group. I think if that changes and that power dynamic shifts and then suddenly it's the group with the most power that has a large target, that could be bad. But I don't think we're anywhere close to that yet, right?"

Megan: "Yeah. Like I get what you're saying, Jake. Like if there's more together, they're easier to find if they're using their heightened senses. But yeah, I'm hoping that if they're still small enough, they're too afraid to take on anything substantial on their own. Like even only a couple of humans together, there were like, 'No, let's go for the weakened ones at the back of the pack.'"

Tass: "Sure, they're doing that hyena shit."

Megan: "Yeah."

Tass: "OK."

Jake: "I mean, what do we do about it then? Are we putting this closer to the top of the queue of things that need to be dealt with? Are we talking about trying to get Lana loose? Are we talking about somebody else taking up her duties somehow for now? Like figuring out how that was working, and doing it ourselves?"

Tass: "Oh boy, I think we save her before we try to go down that road."

Megan: "Yeah, at least we know where she was taken is somewhere we need to get to."

Tass: "Yeah. So that'll be kind of a double op, once we get to that."

Jake: "Yeah. And I mean, if we've got the time to figure out a good idea, I think it could really benefit us to be pulling two things in the same building at once. As long as we understand which one's more important and which one's kind of accepted as the distraction."

Kim: "Rescuing Lana might also help our endeavors with Tranquil Silence? If she's posing as a member of that faction?"

Tass: "Oh my god, what a good call."

Jake: "So maybe down the line here we accept that we're gonna piss off the werewolves a little bit and draw their attention, because we're not gonna be sneaky enough getting to their item. But we are also using that as a cover to bust Lana out, and ..."

Megan: "Gain some favor with the ghosts."

Jake: "That makes sense, but let's put a pin in that for the moment. Kim, what happened with Strohm? You have a good time? A bad time?"

Kim: "Yeah, not a good time. It sucked, actually."

Jake: "What's going on?"

Kim: "Strohm brought in some new people to try to bolster the House of Strohm's number of resident oracles. Some guy named Kester and then this head in a jar. Kind of freaky, actually."

Tass: "Good lord."

Kim: "Anyway, so we were all meeting to try to figure out what we should do, and Tiresias had a vision. And he had a vision that everything Strohm has built — the Vault, the entire house of Strohm — was going to be destroyed, but that it was going to be rebuilt into something better. But that it would cost Strohm her soul."

Tass: "Jesus, that was a roller coaster. So bad, good, then bad again."

Kim: "I mean, bad all the way around. I can't let her do that."

Jake: "I mean, do we think that this has something to do with what we're doing? That, you know, 'everything she's built is going to be destroyed' is basically that we're gonna go back and the future is going to be different, but the future will be better because of it? I don't know in what capacity that costs her her soul, though. Like she should still be kicking back in our time, if that's what we're talking about."

Kim: "Yeah, I don't think Tiresias's vision had anything to do with what we're doing here. If anything, I'm hoping that what we're doing here would ... I mean, if you all get all of the items and go back to where you came from, all of this is gonna be different, right?"

Tass: "Right."

Kim: "So she won't have to make that sacrifice."

Megan: "Well, like what does that mean, cost her her soul? Like I feel like that's an interesting choice of words. Like it didn't say cost her her life. Like in what capacity would Strohm give up her soul?"

Tass: "Kim, you know her far better than we ever did. But I mean, if any of us know anything about her, she is the truest trader that has ever existed. She makes a trade for something more valuable or more useful to her. She's not gonna let that happen without a fight. She's not gonna take the worse deal without a fight. So if she is going to do that, it's gonna be for a damn good reason."

Jake: "Am I missing the part where it's saying that this is a choice that she makes? To me, this doesn't necessarily read as like she's going to decide anything. The cost will be her soul. That doesn't necessarily mean she's going to pay it willingly. This might be just a matter of protecting a victim outright, you know? Like not even from herself, but just from circumstance."

Kim: "She and I are gonna talk more about it tomorrow, but I guess ... I'm in. If whatever we're doing is going to stop Strohm from doing something worse to herself, than I don't care what that means for me."

Tass: "This goes off the way we hope? Maybe it won't even be an issue."

Jake: "We know the one group that deals in souls, and you belong to it right now. So this might merit another conversation with Damien as far as what this could mean, how it could manifest, and if there's any way he could help us deal with it or stop it from coming to fruition."

Kim: "Damien would have some skin in this game, I guess. I kind of didn't tell the complete truth when I read his future."

Megan: "OK, what does that mean?"

Kim: "He asked for where the last bit of energy he needed for his necklace. And me saying that there was no last piece of energy — that part was true. As is needing someone else's help to unlock it. The part that I omitted was that the person whose help he would need is Strohm."

Tass: "Oh, that's not ideal."

Kim: "Yeah, that's why I didn't say anything at the time."

Tass: "Sure. I think you did right. I think you did exactly right. Oh, shit."

Jake: "I mean, that's ... This seems kind of good, then. Kind of poetic. They need each other. Like you can't fight against the person on whom your fate depends. And if their fate depends on each other, then maybe there's a way to start bridging some gaps."

Megan: "Right. So we need Damien to make sure that Strohm's soul doesn't get taken. And Damien needs Strohm to unlock a gem?"

Jake: "Sounds that way."

Megan: "OK."

Kim: "Well, he needs her to unlock a gem a hundred years ago, right?"

Tass: "Yeah."

Jake: "I would say, have your conversation with her tomorrow. See where she's sitting on all this. Maybe ... Maybe don't like pitch these brainstorming sessions to her just yet? But once we know what she thinks it might mean, or what she thinks she might plan to do about it, then maybe we can come to a better conclusion here."

Kim: "I mean, I'm gonna be honest with you all. I really ... I don't like lying to Strohm, and so there is a possibility that your names might get brought up, depending on what all she asks about."

Tass: "I'm not gonna fault you for that, because you're the reason we're here. You're the reason it's working. So if that's your gut, go with your gut."

Jake: "Yeah, I mean, like, we were on OK-ish terms with her, so ..."

Kim: "I guess we'll see what happens tomorrow morning. But just, you know, keep your phones close, in the event that we need to have a face to face at some point tomorrow morning."

Tass: "Yeah, she might be seeing some friends soon."

Kim: "Hell, she might be expecting it tomorrow morning. Who knows?"

Tass: [Chuckles] "Yeah."

Rev: And about this time, James comes over to the group.

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: I think I've figured it out. I have made myself a new counter identity, and I have designed this belt. But I obviously need your help to finish it.

Jake: "Sure thing."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: All right. Channel your magic into the center, there."

Rev: So this is going to be a Keep Your Cool, to get this to go the way that you want. And on a mixed success, it's gonna maybe not work exactly right.

Jake: OK. That's a seven.

Rev: All right. So you are able to get magic into this belt. And I think the issue with it is it's only gonna go off once. So, you know, if you do try to present the idea of, "Hey, this is a magical thing. We can use it to protect something." If he asks to test it later on, when you go to set it up, you know it's not gonna work unless you can find a way to sneakily get some magic back into it.

Jake: OK.

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: All right. I think ... I think that worked.

Rev: And he straps the belt on.

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Say Hello to the Technomancer, Roger Jameson.

Tass: "Oh, I like that."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Yes.

Jake: "OK. So I think this might be kind of a splinter cell mission. I think me and James might be going into the Rookery. If you guys want to knock out the nightmare, we could really kind of accelerate our timeline, here. Not knock out — free the nightmare. Knock out the mission."

Tass: "Yeah. Yeah, yeah."

Jake: "Yeah, yeah. Don't hit the horse."

Tass: "And it's probably better if you weren't there."

All: [Laugh]

Megan: Oh no. Oh, no ...

Jake: "Yeah."

Megan: Tass ...

Kim: A single tear rolls down Jake's cheek.

Megan: Oh, man ...

Jake: I teleport away.

Tass: "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Jake: "You're not wrong."

Megan: "I think that's a good idea."

Kim: "OK. You two be safe, OK?"

Jake: "Oh, I think we'll do our best."

Kim: "If anything goes wrong. Just text us all the emoji of the avocado."

Jake: "If I still have the freedom to text you the emoji of the avocado, things have not yet gone that wrong, so ..."

Kim: [Laughs]

Jake: All right, I will drive me and James back to the Rookery.

Rev: All right. So Grandpa Tincher and Jake get into Jake's car. And Tass summons his motorcycle, that has a sidecar suddenly.

Tass: Yes!

Jake: I love this. Like, I mean, you know, we've talked about Damien's car is kind of like amorphous. We see what we want to see, and then just like his motorcycle is what you need for the occasion right now. Sometimes it's a side car, sometimes it's got saddlebags. Who knows?

Tass: If it's all four of us, it's got a side car on both sides, like little training wheels.

Rev: Makes it super hard drive.

Tass: It does.

Rev: Enormous turning radius.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: All right, so let's go with Jake and Grandpa Tincher first. The two of you pull up to the Rookery building and park in your spot, and he climbs out and cranes his neck backwards to look up at the building.

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Oh, this is beautiful.

Jake: "Yeah. It's really nice. I don't know. Did you ever — did you ever see The Untouchables? It was after you had jumped, but I don't know if ... This is the police station."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Oh.

Jake: "Yeah, yeah."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: I see.

Jake: "Yeah, it's pretty good." I will lead us in to the main desk.

Rev: The two of you head inside to The Lore Merchant's desk. And as you come inside, you hear the familiar buzzing of wings.

Jake: Yeah, I'll look for where she is.

Rev: She is headed down the stairs in your direction. She's got her arms open.

Jake: "Hey, kid."

Rev: She signs hello to you. And then partway down the stairs, she stops and you can see the little tongue coming out of her proboscis, like licking the air — like she's smelling something. And she tilts her head at you, and then lands and sits on the stairs.

Jake: "What's up? We good?"

Rev: She signs, "Yes, I'm good. But we shouldn't discuss it here."

Jake: "OK. I gotta ... I gotta have a quick chat with Lore Merchant. You want to talk first, or you want to talk after?"

Rev: She shakes her head no, and lifts off the stairs and heads back to her room.

Jake: Then I'll walk us up to Lore Merchant.

Rev: THE LORE MERCHANT: Ah, hello. How are you?

Jake: "I'm doing well. How you doing? Busy still?"

Rev: THE LORE MERCHANT: Always.

Jake: "Always. Hey, I wanted to introduce you to somebody. This is Roger Jameson. Roger Jameson is kind of a pioneer in the field of Technomancy. Are you familiar?"

Rev: THE LORE MERCHANT: Only slightly. It's not a field that many pursue.

Jake: "Yeah. He's, uh ... He's doing some really interesting stuff. And we've kind of been talking. It's a blend of magic and technology, and I was kind of thinking that he might really benefit if he could have like a cursory glance at some of the stuff in our archives. I thought that maybe, you know, him being kind of a ... Almost an esteemed guest, right? Like this isn't something a lot of people do. It would be really great if we could collaborate with him, you know? Maybe he could share some of his knowledge, we could share some of our knowledge. And if it's OK with you, I thought that maybe I could take him down there and show him around, get him familiar with the facility, and talk about how we can work together from this point on. What do you think?"

Rev: All right. Jake, roll Persuade an NPC. And as a reminder, you can cash in your debt to get a +3 on your roll.

Jake: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely I will.

Rev: All right, so erase that debt from The Lore Merchant, but you get to add 3 to your total.

Jake: Twelve.

Rev: The Lore Merchant looks at you for a minute, and then looks at Roger Jameson, and then nods.

Rev: THE LORE MERCHANT: Yes, I think that would be a very good idea. We have not had a whole lot of new wizardry come through here, and I think that would be something to just make our place a little more of a center of magic, a pinnacle for those in other parts of the world to look up to. That is a wonderful idea, Brizack.

Jake: "Thank you, sir."

Rev: And he turns and walks over to the blank wall behind his desk. He places his fingertip against it and moves his finger along in a giant circle. And the area inside of that circle turns into green energy, and he gestures towards the portal.

Jake: OK. I will lead us through.

Rev: All right. You lead James through, and it leads you into this large library. You can't exactly tell where this is located, because there are no windows, there are no clocks. There's just shelves and bookcases. Everything is very clearly labeled, and right where you arrived, there are two tomes next to the entrance to this portal. One of them has the location and the item number for all of the magical relics. And then the other one has all of the names and the Dewey Decimal System location for all of the tomes and magical books in here.

Jake: And is Lore Merchant like observing us or coming with us? Or has he just kind of sent us through?

Rev: Yeah, he just sent you through.

Jake: Oh, OK, Perfect. Then I'm gonna consult the relic tome and find out where this artifact lives in here.

Rev: Yeah, you are able to locate it and move over to it. And on a pedestal is this small — maybe two inches high, two inches around — crystal cylinder. And you can see that there's just a little bit of energy inside of it that is pulsing. And James looks back at the portal and then to you, and just shrugs.

Jake: "Yeah, I think this worked." Do I know anything about security precautions in here? Is this gonna, like, set anything off if it is interacted with?

Rev: Why don't you Study a Place of Power?

Jake: Five.

Rev: Yeah, you look around this place, and it almost seems like as you open up your senses and try to get a broader view of this place, that something inside is prohibiting you. Like it's making it so that you can only see the specific things you are focused on in the moment.

Jake: "If there's a security here, I'm not aware of it. But I mean, I think we can go for it. And if, you know, things do break bad, we've ridden this far on this reasoning, so maybe we can ride it a little further."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Yes. It's not like I've got to steal it or anything. I just have to, uh ...

Rev: And he reaches out and grabs it in his hand and pulls it to himself. And then he freezes and waits, and his eyes dart around the room, looking for anything to happen. And nothing happens.

Jake: Yes!

Rev: He slides open the panel on his arm and starts to check the readouts and punches in a couple of things. And a few moments pass, and he sets it back down.

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: All right, let's go.

Jake: "Let's go check a book here, just so that we've got a good reason why we were in here and we accomplished something."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Oh, yes. Yes, we should probably maybe look at a couple of things, in case like he can check the record of what was looked at. So it wasn't just this one thing. But this is actually, very coincidentally, a very good thing to look at. Because it's technology that we want to power with magic. That's very interesting.

Jake: Yeah, I'm gonna go back to the tome that talks about the volumes, and find a couple of books about shield spells and stuff like that. So that it's related to the item we prepped, in case we need that.

Rev: Yeah, you are able to find a couple of books like that and leaf through them. And James actually takes notes on a couple of things.

Jake: Perfect. All right. Yeah, once we have established an extra solid cover here, I'll lead him back out.

Rev: All right. You head out through the portal that you came in through, and The Lore Merchant turns.

Rev: THE LORE MERCHANT: Were you able to find anything worthwhile?

Jake: "Yeah. Yeah, we've got a ... We're kind of collaborating on maybe this idea of some kind of shield device. And so we were looking through some of the power items and the spells related to shielding. And I think we might have something, here."

Rev: THE LORE MERCHANT: Oh, yes. Like some kind of a secondary shield, that when a primary shield went down ...

Jake: "Could kind of fire up, as a backup."

Rev: THE LORE MERCHANT: Yes. Oh, that's very good.

Jake: "Yeah. Yeah, you're real busy, though. Do you want in, like I'll kind of come to you for — you know, see if you've got any ideas to spitball."

Rev: THE LORE MERCHANT: Yes, please keep me up to date on it.

Jake: "Yeah, for sure." All right. I'll hand James the keys and be like, "Hey, go wait in the car. I need to go check in with the kid real quick."

Rev: JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: All right, I will see you in just a little bit.

Rev: And he grabs the keys and heads out the door.

Jake: I'll head up to talk with Dani.

Rev: You head up the stairs, and Dani is sitting at a table in her room. And her head tilts up towards you as you walk in the door.

Jake: "Hey, what's going on?"

Rev: She stands up and walks over to you, and you see the little tongue darting out of the proboscis again. And you can see that her forehead furrows a little bit. And she signs to you, "Do you know Borbauk?"

Jake: "I don't really know him. I encountered him earlier today."

Rev: She signs to you. "Can I go home?"

Kim: Oh ...

Jake: "Man ... I wish I could tell you yes, but I don't think so. You know, my duty here is to take care of you, but it is to take care of you for the Order of the Ley Line. I mean, I could start trying to float that idea. I could start trying to make some progress on getting to take you back home. But they're gonna want a good reason, you know? And if you just go? They're gonna look for you."

Rev: She looks at you for a long moment, and then she signs to you. "My smell is on you, and your Borbauk's smell is on you. If the wrong people get that scent, someone will come for your life."

Jake: "Someone specific?"

Rev: She nods, and she raises her open hand with her fingers pointing up and her thumb touching her chin. And you recognize that as the gesture for Mother.

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.