

# The Spirit of Giving (S5, E22)

**Jake:** The Critshow contains elements of horror, fantasy violence, and adult language. Content warnings can be found in the episode description.

**SFX:** INTRO MUSIC

**Rev:** We didn't record this week as we are taking the holiday off, so there's no intro. I got no intro for you. So go listen to the episode. Go on. What are you waiting for? Get out of here.

[Beat]

No, seriously, there's no ... No, there's no intro. Just ... Just the episode. Go on.

[Beat]

Are you still waiting? There's no — I promise there is no intro. It is just me at my desk. There's no intro.

[Beat]

Okay, bye.

**SFX:** CRITSHOW STINGER

**Rev:** You are all inside of the PT Cruiser, inside of the subterranean lair. Landara is standing next to the driver's window with her gun raised, looking back between Kim and Megan at Carrington.

**Megan:** I open the door and scramble out.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Kim:** Yeah, same.

**Jake:** Yeah, I think same.

**Tass:** I don't. I turn and look at her over my shoulder. "Oh, fuck you!"

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: What?

**Tass:** "I was onto you!"

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: What are you talking about?

**Tass:** [Sighs] I'm gonna kick the door open and step out. "It's okay, everybody. It's chill. I mean, sort of."

**Jake:** "Why are you being so casual about this? She mind controlled us."

**Tass:** "Yeah, and now she can't."

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: Well, I ... I what?

**Kim:** "You enthralled us, but in a very literal sense."

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: Oh. Oh, god. Is that why everyone's so nice to me?

**Kim:** "Wait, you didn't know you were doing this?"

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: Um ... I mean, I know that there was something about me that people just always listen to me and wanted to be my friend.

**Megan:** I want to try to read her mind.

**Rev:** Yeah. Why don't you roll Investigate a Mystery with your Telepathy ability? And as this is going on, Geoffrey and Grandpa Tincher and Rev have all just frozen where they are.

**Megan:** Nine.

**Rev:** All right, you get a hold 1.

**Megan:** What is being concealed here?

**Rev:** You get the distinct feeling that she was aware that she was doing something. But you also remember it coming over you, and it seemed to be when your mind was turned on her, not when her mind was turned on you. So it almost seems like a defense mechanism — something that she wasn't controlling but maybe was aware happened. But it was happening to literally everyone she met. So to think of it as something she did, it doesn't strike her that way.

**Megan:** I think I just open up a mental chat room with all of us and Carrington. [Telepathically] "Don't pretend like you weren't aware something was going on."

**Rev:** When you open up this chat room between her and the rest of the group, it's not as strong but you do feel that sense again of warmth towards her, with all of your minds linked.

**Megan:** I think when I feel that pull and I recognize it, I shut off the chat room and I just say aloud like, "Hey, she still definitely has some sort of ability."

**Tass:** "Yeah, okay. I don't think we need to panic here. We don't ... We certainly don't need to have guns raised. Nothing like this. We can all relax a little bit. I started to pick up on this back there before she took me, but yeah, it's like ... I don't know, it's like some poison animals, right? That let themselves get bit so that you sort of give that little bit of a warning to others? Or, you know, let them fall to whatever it is your defense is. She couldn't control it, but it was a defense that she knew she had."

**Rev:** LANDARA: What the fuck are you talking about? I thought Jake just said that it was like some kind of mental control. If this person can control your minds, then I need to shoot her.

**Kim:** "Uh, it's not really like mental control? It's more like you start just feeling, like, amiable thoughts towards her. I guess that sounds like mental control."

**Jake:** "It is a form of mental control. She made us love her. But it sounds like it was inherent and not deliberate. And I guess that's a different discussion."

**Rev:** LANDARA: What, like your favorite movie star? How you ... Like, they don't try to make you fall in love with them.

**Jake:** "Yeah, they're just so charming."

**Rev:** LANDARA: Yeah.

**Jake:** "Yes, exactly like that."

**Rev:** LANDARA: Okay.

**Megan:** "Except you don't really have a choice whether or not you like them."

**Jake:** "Now, I don't really have a choice whether or not I like Henry Cavill, so ..."

**Megan:** "That's fair. I don't think she's able to do it as strongly here. Like, I still felt that. Did you guys feel that, when I opened up that communication? That there was still a little bit of that pull?"

**Tass:** "Yeah."

**Kim:** "Yeah, a little bit."

**Megan:** "Yeah. So it's still here, but maybe not as strong."

**Tass:** "Either way. Like she could have put us in a bad spot so many times. All she was trying to do was live in a place that was trying to kill everybody. I'm not mad at that. I'm mad that I fell for it. I'm mad that there's a little bit of, 'oh, what's going on' happening here. Like, fucking stop it. But ..." And I just — I literally look around the room. "I mean, come on. Raise your hand if you're at least a little bit dangerous."

**Rev:** As you look around the room, you notice that there is a new door in the wall. It is just behind where the computer is. And that door opens and Ori comes out, kind of wiping his eyes like he's just woken up.

**Rev:** ORI: Hey, what's going on? Why's everybody got their hands raised?

**Tass:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** He looks around, just slowly raises his.

**Tass:** "Yeah, that's ... That's correct."

**Kim:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** ORI: I heard raised voices.

**Kim:** "Oh, yeah, Yeah. We had a whole little standoff here. Also, we went to space and it really sucked."

**Rev:** ORI: Oh.

**Kim:** "We'll get into that later. It's a long story. But, uh... Yeah."

**Tass:** I turn back, I think, to the team here. "Yeah, absolutely. She has the potential to do whatever she can do again, probably. But like, we're not just gonna shoot her, okay? So, like, what do we want to do? What do we want to do about this?"

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: Can I try?

**Jake:** "Can you try what?"

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: Like to see if I can do it?

**Jake:** "I think so. But I think that we should take some time and establish, like, protocols here. I mean, yeah, we spend time figuring out what people are capable of. We just do it

in a responsible way. Maybe we contact Margaret, we have her run her through the test. See what she can do in a controlled manner. We've all been through it."

**Tass:** "Sounds good to me."

**Megan:** "Are you up for using this ability to help other people?"

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: Uh, I ... I don't know. I don't even know if I can do it? But I ... Uh, this is a lot. I don't want to be shot by you.

**Rev:** And she looks at Landara, who lowers the gun.

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: So if using this is the alternative, then I suppose.

**Jake:** "You're not gonna be shot. Tass is right." And I'm also, like, looking at Landara pointedly. "There's no reason to shoot her." And I look back at Carrington. "And you don't have to do something you don't want to do under threat of penalty of death. That would be pretty fucked up. So we'd love to figure out what you're capable of. I imagine you would love to know that as well. And then once we determine that, we'll figure out what you want to do with your new life here, I guess."

**Rev:** CARRINGTON: Yes, I suppose so.

**Rev:** ORI: I just, uh ... You guys look beat.

**Jake:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** ORI: Why don't you go sleep? I'll take her to the IPT.

**Tass:** "Man, if you're okay with that, I'm not going to say no."

**Rev:** ORI: Yeah. I mean, I just woke up, so ... I'm good.

**Kim:** "That's really, really sweet of you. Does the IP ... I thought that the IPT had wards against, um, vampires."

**Rev:** ORI: Yeah, but I can at least take her to the front door. Now that it's underground, it's a lot easier.

**Megan:** "Yeah. We can just give Margaret a heads up so she'll be expecting it."

**Rev:** LANDARA: I think I'm gonna go too. Just ... Just in case.

**Jake:** "Okay." I'm doing, like, a wagging my finger. "No guns, no shootings." This ... Okay. I'm sorry, I'm hung up on this random door that Ori has come out of.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Jake:** What is — what is it? There's just a new door in the wall?

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Kim:** We were gone for like four days.

**Jake:** Did I see any — like when he opened the door, was there room visible beyond him or anything? Where the fuck did he just come from?

**Rev:** Do you want to go check?

**Jake:** I suppose. I just don't want to make a big deal of it in the fiction.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Tass:** And by not doing so, make a big deal. Because we're like, why is Jake just backing towards the door in the middle of casual conversation?

**Megan:** Rev's like, I just told you there was a random new door. Please, in the fiction, make it a big deal.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Jake:** I'm suddenly — like, in this conversation being about, like, being a paranoid conversation. Now I'm like, wait a minute, why did Ori just come out of a new door and why does he seem like he's acting kind of weird?

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Jake:** So yeah, I want to go check out this door.

**Rev:** Okay. Yeah. Landara and Ori walk over to Carrington and start to lead her out of the subterranean lair. And Grandpa Tincher kind of watches the three of them leave, and then watches Jake start to walk towards the door.

**Rev:** JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Oh, yes. While you were gone ... I guess one of the benefits of having Anastacia in charge and being aware of our situation here underground, she had some rooms constructed out of the old sewer tunnels that used to lead by here.

**Jake:** I want to look inside.

**Rev:** Yeah, you open up and it opens into a large lobby that then has a kitchen off to the side. And there are half a dozen doors on each side of this large room.

**Rev:** JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: I believe Ori has claimed that one. But these are all bedrooms. She thought it might be best, for everything going on, for us not to necessarily leave. And Geoffrey had the opportunity while you were gone to expand the wards, so that they are covered underneath the wards of the subterranean lair.

**Jake:** "How did you do this this fast?"

**Rev:** JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: I'll be quite honest, I'm almost positive that Anastacia started building all of this before she told us. Because she told us, and then they put the door in.

**Jake:** "Oh."

**Tass:** "Yeah, that tracks."

**Kim:** "So we're just having like a sleepover down here? Like, forever?"

**Rev:** JAMES FRANCIS TINCHER: Oh. Well, maybe until you're not hunted by a man who wants to end the world.

**Kim:** "Okay. Yeah, that's fair. I mean, listen, this is ... This is the nicest sewer I've ever been in."

**Jake:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** And Rev steps out of the circle, and you can see that he is being helped by Geoffrey. It's not super noticeable, but there are a couple of new strands of gray hair on his head that weren't there before. Something about this time magic seemed to really take it out of him. And Geoffrey actually walks him back through that door and takes him into one of the bedrooms and helps him lay down.

**Tass:** "Hoo, I guess that's rough on more than just us going through, huh?"

**Jake:** "Yeah. I'm with Ori. I think we should get some sleep and continue all these discussions afterwards."

**Kim:** Yeah, I just want to send Strohm a quick text, to let her know that I'm back and I'm okay.

**Rev:** All right, So you all head back into this newly built little complex and claim a room. Inside of the room is a bed and a dresser. There is an en suite. It's really nice. They're really nice little kind of apartments off of this main lobby. And now that the adrenaline of Landara and the large gun — which is my new children's book.

**Jake:** By Roald Dahl.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Rev:** Wears off, you're all in pretty rough shape. You came through with some damage. You also had used some Intuition. And coming back through, having spent that kind of

has a level of exhaustion added to it. And you all claim one of the rooms and lay down. Your sleep is heavy and dreamless, and you're not sure how long it is. But then you hear a voice outside of all of your rooms.

**Rev:** REV: Hey, guys. Guys, wake up.

**Tass:** [Sleepy] "Hmm? Who is it?"

**Rev:** REV: Come on. Come out, come out, come out.

**Megan:** I stumble out from my room.

**Rev:** You all come out, and Rev is standing there. He looks a little more well rested. And he's standing by the door that leads back out into the subterranean lair proper.

**Rev:** REV: It seemed like you guys were about as wiped out as I was. You slept for almost two and a half days.

**Jake:** "Whoa!"

**Kim:** "Oh, my god!"

**Megan:** "I'm starving."

**Tass:** "That wasn't enough."

**Rev:** REV: Yeah. And I kind of lost track of time while I was doing the spell. Apparently, like, four or five days passed? And then I slept — I actually just got up a couple of hours ago. I don't know about you, but ...

**Rev:** And he walks over and he opens the door to the subterranean lair, and music starts to pour through.

**SFX:** "JINGLE BELL" INSTRUMENTAL PLAYS

**Rev:** And you can see that Grandpa Tincher is putting the finishing touches on a Christmas tree.

**Rev:** REV: I did not realize that it was Christmas Eve day. I think we gotta go to the mall. I need to buy gifts.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Rev:** Welcome to our holiday special.

**Megan:** Yay!

**SFX:** CRITSHOW HOLIDAY THEME

**Rev:** So it is about 8:00 at night on Christmas Eve, and we find all of you in the parking lot of the mall. You have just parked, and you are headed in for some last minute Christmas shopping. Rev has got a list on his phone that he is looking at.

**Rev:** REV: I was not prepared for this holiday whatsoever. Like I've got a list of things to get. I have done none of it.

**Tass:** "I mean, out of fairness. Yeah, we're all sort of in that boat. We can ride this boat together."

**Rev:** REV: Yeah, we'll get this sorted out.

**Kim:** "Would it be better if we, like, divvied up that list so that we all kind of, like, made quicker work of this?"

**Rev:** REV: I mean, this is my list, like, for...

**Kim:** "Oh, for us!"

**Rev:** REV: Yeah, yeah.

**Kim:** "Oh, I thought it was just like you were doing, like, chores on Christmas Eve. Like, I don't, like, forgot, I don't — like ornaments or something. I don't know."

**Rev:** REV: No, no. Like Christmas shopping. Like, I don't have gifts for anybody.

**Kim:** "Oh!"

**Rev:** REV: Do you?

**Kim:** "Well please. By all means, don't let me stand in the way of you getting me presents."

**Rev:** [Laughs]

**Megan:** "I'm the gift."

**Rev:** REV: Okay.

**Megan:** "You're welcome."

**Rev:** And he reaches down and checks Megan's name off the list.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Rev:** And as you all start to head inside, you are not alone. There are a lot of people at this mall still, doing shopping. You come in and it leads directly into the food court. And then the bulk of the food court is taken up with an enormous mountain of snow. You can see that there are steps that lead up to the top of it. And at the top is Santa Claus, sitting in his giant candy cane throne. And there is a long line of children waiting to be seen by Santa Claus. Off to the side of this big snow mountain, you can see that there are a couple of people. They look a little suspicious, because they're trying so hard not to look suspicious, but they are wheeling a gurney out.

**Jake:** An occupied gurney?

**Rev:** Why don't you roll Investigate a Mystery?

**Jake:** Oh, okay. Five.

**Rev:** It's hard to tell from this distance. They are being super careful about it. And it is laden with other things, like coats and packages. But it sure seems like there's something underneath.

**Kim:** Were there any emergency vehicles outside, like in the parking lot?

**Rev:** Not that you saw.

**Jake:** Is this an actual mark experience scenario?

**Rev:** It is.

**Jake:** This is canonical?

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Jake:** I level up.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Kim:** Yay!

**Tass:** What are you gonna take?

**Jake:** I don't know. We just got back to this game. I was unprepared.

**Rev:** [Laughs]

**Jake:** I am going to take another move from The Spellslinger. I'm going to take Practitioner.

**Rev:** Hmm.

**Jake:** Choose two effects available to you under Use Magic. Take +1 to Use Magic whenever you choose one of those effects.

**Rev:** Oh, what are those gonna be?

**Jake:** I'm gonna choose trap a specific person, minion, or monster, and observe another place or time.

**Rev:** Okay.

**Megan:** Can I reach out and see if I can connect telepathically and see what they're thinking as there trying to be like real suspicious in getting this out? Or, not suspicious.

**Rev:** Yeah. I think that this can be another Investigate a Mystery. Like it's different enough from what Jake was doing, and you've got a specific move that lets you get into people's heads. So yeah, roll Investigate a Mystery.

**Megan:** Nine.

**Rev:** All right, you get a hold 1.

**Megan:** What happened here?

**Rev:** Yeah. The thought that you were getting from this person's head, you pretty quickly discover that they are indeed an EMT. And the thought that they're having is...

**Rev:** EMT: Oh, man. I hope we can get this out of here without anybody noticing. We don't want to cause a bunch of chaos inside of this mall. What are the odds that this elf would just die in the middle of a shift.

**Jake:** Oh, god!

**Kim:** Oof, grim.

**Megan:** "Oh, an elf died."

**Jake:** "Like one of the mall employee elves? I guess that's a dumb question."

**Kim:** "I have to assume. Not a literal elf."

**Jake:** "We don't know! We've seen weirder."

**Kim:** "That's true."

**Megan:** "I don't know. Can't see under the sheet. EMT just said, don't want to cause a panic. What are the chances this elf would die right here during his job, or whatever."

**Rev:** And I think this would be a good time, as Megan makes that reveal, if you've got a beginning of mystery move, now would be the time to roll it.

**Tass:** Oh, I have that again!

**Kim:** Me too! We're about to have two visions.

**Tass:** Well, I hope.

**Jake:** Yeah, theoretically.

**Rev:** No matter what, you're having a vision.

**Tass:** [Laughs uneasily]

**Kim:** We're seeing something, the both of us.

**Jake:** I love this. Like, "Oh, an elf died. Oh man." [Explosion noise] Visions. "Oh, okay. This is ... This matters. Oh, no, this is important."

**Megan:** It was fine before.

**Jake:** It was fine when it was just this fucking peon dying in the line of duty, as all elves are expected to do.

**Megan:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** I think we should mention this. Tass has new dice, specifically for The Chosen.

**Tass:** I do. I have gold dice that are plated in these little crystals.

**Rev:** It looks like his shotgun.

**Kim:** Nine.

**Tass:** Seven.

**Rev:** All right. Could you both remind me about your moves, and what you get on a mixed success?

**Kim:** On a hit, you get a vision of a future where the Keeper's countdown clock has reached midnight.

**Tass:** And I get to see what is revealed about my immediate future. On a 7 to 9, I get a vague hint about it.

**Rev:** So Kim, as the tarot cards flip through your hand and your eyes fill with this white light, you get a vision of the moon over this mall. And as it reaches the point where you know it is the middle of the night, a darkness descends on this mall, and there are people screaming and wailing. And your vision ducks inside of the mall. And you can see that everyone inside is being injured by manifestations. People are gorging themselves on imaginary foods. Some people are being crushed with enormous computers. Some people are choking on large wads of money. Everyone inside of this mall is dying, and they are dying at the same time as all of these spectral things appear around them. Tass, what you see — and how does your vision come to you now?

**Tass:** I think it's similar to way back, when I just ... I kind of get a little winded and like my eyes glaze over a little bit. But in this case, they glaze over gold. There's nothing flashy about it unless you're looking close. But after it ends, is when it really kind of hits hard.

**Rev:** And what you see in this vision is this mall that you are in, and there is a dome over it. And it looks like a magical protective dome, but it's corrupted. You can see that there are gaps in it, that there are cracks and fractures. And you get these glimpses of salts and silver and symbols. But none of them are right. Something is off about all of it. Something's corrupt.

**Tass:** "Whoa ... Kim, did you just do your thing?"

**Kim:** "I did."

**Tass:** "I did my thing."

**Kim:** "What did you see?"

**Tass:** "Like everything here was broken. Like cracked. And there were elements to it, like salt and silver and maybe, like, things for ... I don't know if it's stuff or runes, or what. It was very ... Well, it was vague, I guess. But something about it was corrupted or incorrect. Something like that? I don't know what the fuck that is."

**Kim:** "Yeah. I saw a vision of a couple of hours from now. Everyone in this mall is going to die at the same time, killed by manifestations of all sorts of freaky shit."

**Tass:** Well, and I just start turning on a heel, looking for, like, a fire alarm.

**Jake:** I am completely on board with that. I think we need to start evacuating this mall.

**Tass:** Ooh, before we do anything, should we look around in a little more detail first? Like if there's something here that might be upset by a current flow of things, could that escalate? Like, I don't know. I'm not sure what I'm asking. Does this make sense?

**Jake:** Like if we try to evacuate, it might jump the timeline forward, because that's its own problem?

**Tass:** Sure, yeah.

**Jake:** Yeah. I mean, I guess that's could be true.

**Kim:** Hey, GM, out of curiosity. How late is this mall open tonight?

**Rev:** Till midnight.

**Kim:** Yeah, okay. So that seems like a pretty doom and gloom hour everyone dies at.

**Jake:** "Do we think it's safe to assume this is related to the deceased elf?"

**Tass:** "Yeah, I suppose so. Us finding out about it, I would say, just sort of caused our thing to happen, right?"

**Kim:** "Yeah. I mean, it might not hurt to try to ask maybe some of the other elves to see if they saw anything happen. Like this guy do anything, or anything happen to him. In the vision I saw, it was pretty graphic. Like people being crushed by TVs, or eating food until they burst, or choking on money. Like bad shit. Stuff that wouldn't go unnoticed."

**Tass:** "Do you want me to try to catch up with those guys, and see if I can inspect the body?"

**Jake:** "Yeah, they might have some extra information. Do you still have your badge?"

**Tass:** "Yeah, you know I do." And I'm gonna turn and sprint, see if I have any chance of catching them.

**Rev:** Yeah. What are the rest are you doing?

**Kim:** I think I'm gonna go to Santa's village and see if I can find anyone who may have worked with this elf.

**Jake:** I'm gonna see if I can't find the security office, see if the cameras picked anything up.

**Megan:** Yeah, that's a good idea. I'm gonna get out of the public eye here real quick and see if I can't put out some feelers, and see if I can tell if something's going on from any specific place. Or whatever it is that might be planning to cause all of this, so ...

**Jake:** Okay.

**Rev:** All right. Let's go with Tass first. Tass heads out of the mall, trying to catch up with the two people wheeling the gurney out. How are you approaching them?

**Tass:** I think I have out my FBI badge. And I'm clearly hurrying, but I'm not, like, yelling. You know, I also am trying to follow the theme here of them, like, trying to keep this quiet. So it's just an, "Excuse me, excuse me." And I'm, like, holding up the badge, like, close to my chest so that they can see if they're looking that direction without trying to cause a scene.

**Rev:** EMT: Wait, you're with FBI too?

**Tass:** "Yeah."

**Rev:** EMT: Agent Beasley send you?

**Tass:** "Beasley? No, I don't know Beasley."

**Rev:** EMT: Beasley's the one in charge of this. She's the one who sent us out this door.

**Tass:** "Oh. Kay, I'm local. I was just called in from one of the other spots. Maybe we just got some wires crossed."

**Rev:** EMT: Local FBI?

**Tass:** "Well, yeah. I'm sorta off duty. I just was here, and got the call through to just follow up."

**Rev:** Tass, why don't you roll Manipulate Someone?

**Tass:** Yeah, that's ... That's probably good.

**Jake:** Take a -4.

**Kim:** Yeah. Oh, boy.

**Rev:** I would give you a minus, but you got a badge.

**Tass:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** You got a magical badge, so ...

**Tass:** Nice. Man, we haven't been in this game. What's a five do?

**Jake:** Depends. On the dice, or like out of five stars?

**Rev:** [Laughs] Five on each die?

**Tass:** I wish.

**Rev:** One of the EMTs reaches out to look at your badge. And they look up at you and they look down at the badge, and then they pocket it.

**Tass:** You just snatches my badge?

**Rev:** EMT: Just a second. Just a second. Let me call Beasley out here. I'm sure that she can straighten this up.

**Tass:** "Mmhmm."

**Rev:** And he pulls a little walkie talkie out of his pocket.

**Rev:** EMT: Agent Beasley, we got another fellow here. Says he's FBI. Yeah, no, we'll stay right here. All right.

**Rev:** And he looks at the other guy. He's like ...

**Rev:** EMT: Keep moving this into the back of the vehicle, and we'll wait here for Agent Beasley.

**Rev:** Inside. Megan, I think that you finding a quiet corner is probably the quickest. So yeah, what are you doing exactly?

**Megan:** Yeah. I'm gonna head over to the pile of snow, the big mountain, and kind of climb in behind the Christmas trees, like behind a big candy cane or something. And just kind of settle down, and try and reach out telepathically and see if I can't make a connection with something.

**Rev:** Yeah. Why don't you roll Tune In?

**Megan:** Twelve.

**Rev:** All right, You get a hold 3.

**Megan:** Where is the creature right now?

**Rev:** So you try to reach out with your mind and get a sense of what is forcing this, what is creating this, and where is it? And you don't get any one specific strong spike of intent. It's very fine and light, but you get a sense that it has potential everywhere. And I think that part of this answer is, well, also lets you know that when you Investigate a Mystery, the phenomenon questions are on the table.

**Megan:** Ooh.

**Kim:** Ooh!

**Jake:** Ooh!

**Rev:** But yeah, it is not manifest in any one particular place, but it seems like it could manifest anywhere.

**Megan:** Gotcha. Well, working off the assumption that it's the thing that caused the death of this elf, who is it going to attack next?

**Rev:** You have the feeling that it is drawn towards vices. So someone who is indulging in something that's maybe not great for them, but feels good in the moment, that that's who

it's going to go after. And I think from where you are sitting in this snow pile, like at back of Santa's Mountain, you can see all of the food court, but you can also see where the escalator goes up kind of to the next floor. And you see Jake headed up the escalator towards the security office. And there is someone sitting inside of the security office, and they have got headphones on. And they are scrolling their phone with one hand, and they have got multiple screens tuned to different television stations, aside from just all of the security camera footage that they're seeing. And you get a strong pull from that person.

**Kim:** I really thought you were about to put Jake on blast.

**Jake:** You see Jake going up the escalator. And somehow in the second since you last saw him, he's got Dippin' Dots ...

**Kim:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** A new fur coat.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Megan:** He has something from every one of the food cart options.

**Rev:** [Chuckles]

**Kim:** [Chuckles]

**Megan:** Oof. Okay, so knowing kind of what it's interested in and how it's kind of focused on this person up there, what is it planning to do right now?

**Rev:** You heard Kim talk about people being attacked by these manifestations. And it's hard to tell if they were real, if they were symbolic, if they were metaphysical. But it seems like the things in that room, once this manifest, will try to kill him. The things that he is currently distracting himself with.

**Megan:** I think in the moments before Jake kind of leaves my line of sight, I'm just going to reach out telepathically to him, get inside that little chat room and just be like, [Telepathically] "Hey, Jake?"

**Jake:** [Telepathically] "Yes?"

**Megan:** [Telepathically] "I think that security guard you're gonna see if there is gonna be in danger here soon."

**Jake:** [Telepathically] "Oh, what kind of danger?"

**Megan:** [Telepathically] "Something about things he's distracting himself with that are gonna, like, manifest and attack him. Kind of like Kim was saying."

**Jake:** [Telepathically] "Okay."

**Megan:** [Telepathically] "It's drawn towards vices. I don't really know what it is. It's kind of everywhere. But I think he's kind of on the radar for it next."

**Jake:** [Telepathically] "Okay."

**Megan:** [Telepathically] "Nice fur coat."

**All:** [Laugh]

**Megan:** I cut off the chat room.

**Rev:** Yeah, Jake. So as you come to the top of the escalator, Megan's chat room cuts out and you see the security officer that she was talking about sitting in his chair. He's got headphones on, he's scrolling through his phone, and you can see a number of different television stations on the screens around him — not just the security footage that he's supposed to be watching.

**Jake:** All right. I'll kind of like knock on the door as I poke my head in.

**Rev:** He turns around and looks at you and pulls out one earbud.

**Jake:** "Happy holidays."

**Rev:** SECURITY OFFICER: Yeah, you too.

**Jake:** "Busy evening in here?"

**Rev:** SECURITY OFFICER: Yeah. A little busier than usual. That time of year. People last minute shopping.

**Jake:** "Yeah. What are you watching? Other than the monitors?"

**Rev:** SECURITY OFFICER: You ever watch Mama's Family?

**Jake:** "I can't say I'm familiar. Tell me about it."

**Rev:** SECURITY OFFICER: Oh, it's good. It was based off a skit from The Carol Burnett Show. Vicki Lawrence played the grandma, and she had kids and grandkids that weren't too bright. And they spun it off into a sitcom. Real popular.

**Jake:** "Oh, okay. So is this, like, TV Land?"

**Rev:** SECURITY OFFICER: Yeah.

**Jake:** "Hey, did you notice anything weird happened down near Santa's village?"

**Rev:** He squints at you.

**Jake:** "I'm not, like, trying to get away with anything. I think something bad might have happened. And I wondered if you picked anything up."

**Rev:** SECURITY OFFICER: Listen, I already talked to ... No, wait. Who are you?

**Jake:** "Oh, I'm sorry. My name's Jake." I'll hold out a handshake.

**Rev:** DOMINIC: I'm Dominic. But I already talked to the FBI lady. She just left.

**Jake:** "Oh, my god. There's an FBI lady here?"

**Rev:** DOMINIC: No! God damn it. No, it's fine. Everything is fine now.

**Jake:** "I have reason to believe everything's not fine. I'm just a little worried. Would you mind telling me what you saw? Or can I, like, look through the footage or anything and see what happened? I'm not FBI. I'll explain to you as much as you want, but I don't think you're gonna believe me."

**Rev:** DOMINIC: Go on.

**Jake:** [Sighs] "I was on TV. Do you remember me on TV? Did you see ... You watch a lot of TV. You remember when, like the lightning guy in the circle downtown?"

**Rev:** DOMINIC: Oh, yeah. Yeah. "I don't know who you are, but ..."

**Jake:** "Yeah." I do, like, the pose. I do like a holding a hammer pose. I'm like, "That was ... That was me."

**Rev:** DOMINIC: Where's your hammer?

**Jake:** "I've sort of adopted a different methodology." And I hold up the wand, which is the handle of the hammer. "So the hammer's not exactly in play anymore. But anyway, point is, I'm part of a group that handles ... Sort of supernatural phenomena, and it seems like this is one of them. And I'm just trying to protect folks, like you are."

**Rev:** Jake, roll Manipulate Someone.

**Jake:** Okay. Long road to hoe to get there. But by god, I got there.

**Rev:** Yeah, you did.

**Jake:** Seven.

**Rev:** He gets up and goes over one of the computers and starts typing some things in. And after a couple of moments, a picture of you comes up on the internet from that moment — like where you're talking to the camera, holding the hammer, and there's like lightning in the background — and you see a laser printer kicks to life.

**Rev:** DOMINIC: Will you sign this?

**Jake:** "Yeah, absolutely." I'll grab a marker off his desk and sign this photo. "To Dominic ..."

**Rev:** DOMINIC: No, no, no. Just ...

**Jake:** "Oh, for resale?"

**Rev:** DOMINIC: [Sputters]

**Jake:** "Like to put on Ebay?"

**Rev:** DOMINIC: I don't want to ... Listen, do you want to see this footage or not?

**Jake:** "I do. But come on, man."

**Rev:** DOMINIC: All right, fine. Two. One for me, one for ..."

**Jake:** "For selling?"

**Rev:** DOMINIC: For People. They want to ... You know, you're ...

**Jake:** "Well then they can come get one. I'm not charging for 'em."

**Rev:** DOMINIC: You come get one.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Kim:** Sexy. Jesus.

**Rev:** DOMINIC: Listen, that's my price. I want you to sign one. Two, now.

**Megan:** I like how ...

**Jake:** I made it worse!

**Megan:** I like how it went from, "I'll just take the one. No, don't put my name on it. Fine, I'll take one with my name on it." [Laughs]

**Rev:** [Laughs]

**Jake:** I guess I'll take one, for me.

**Rev:** That was like the, "Oh, do you want your picture with Ant-Man?"

**All:** [Laugh]

**Rev:** So yeah, he prints out another one and hands them both to you.

**Jake:** All right. I'll sign one just with my signature, and then I'll sign one "To Dominic."

**Rev:** He tucks them away in a folder and goes over and closes the door, and he brings you over to one of the monitors, and he pulls up kind of the back stage of Santa's Mountain. There are a couple of tables there, and some elves are sitting and drinking, and there's a Santa Claus on a cot taking a nap. And he starts rewinding it. And you can see that there's this elf sitting back there by themselves. And as this video plays through, the elf looks up, and they look at a spot where there's nothing there. And then they step forward and they fall to their knees, and they start clutching at their heart. And they keep looking back to this spot where there isn't anything there, but then looking at the spot on the ground where they're kneeling, and then eventually they fall over.

**Rev:** DOMINIC: I don't know what was going on. The coroner said it was a heart attack. They want to get the body out unnoticed. Don't want, you know, panicked people. Mall's real crowded. Christmas Eve, and all that.

**Jake:** "You notice how they keep like looking at nothing in that one spot?"

**Rev:** DOMINIC: Yeah.

**Jake:** "I think something weird is going on. I think something that the camera can't see. Will you do me a favor? Cut the TV for the rest of the night? I think this thing is attracted to people who are, like, indulging, so to speak. And I'm afraid it might come for you if you're not careful."

**Rev:** DOMINIC: Oh.

**Rev:** He changes all of the televisions back to other views of kind of the same areas in the mall.

**Jake:** I'm gonna write down my phone number for him, and be like, "If you see anything else weird going on on these cameras, give me a call."

**Megan:** He puts that in the folder. [Laughs]

**Jake:** Yeah. And then sell it later, whatever.

**Megan:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** DOMINIC: You know ...

**Rev:** You start to go towards the door, and he ...

**Rev:** DOMINIC: I did see one other strange thing. Come here. Come here, come here, come here.

**Jake:** Yeah, I'll go check.

**Rev:** And he pulls up another feed, and it's a set of the doors that lead kind of back into the tunnels that go behind, like, all the stores and stuff?

**Jake:** Yeah.

**Rev:** And you see a man run out, and he looks pretty harried. He's in a very nice suit. His hair is slicked back, and you can see he stops and he looks around, and then you can see him run up the escalator into a store that's only like three stores over. And he kind of keeps cutting to different cameras, but you can see him inside of the store, rummaging around. And he grabs something and bounds back down the escalator, and back through those double doors leading to the back hallways.

**Jake:** Okay. I'm going to reach past Dominic and grab one of the other mall security badges that's on the desk. And be like, "I'm taking this. I'll bring it back later."

**Rev:** DOMINIC: But do you want to know what's weird?

**Jake:** "Yes, I do. I mean, that looked weird. There's more?"

**Rev:** DOMINIC: That's the owner of the mall.

**Jake:** "Would he normally be here right now?"

**Rev:** DOMINIC: It's not unheard of. He likes to make surprise visits. Drop ins.

**Jake:** Okay. And I'm gonna head out of this office.

**Rev:** Kim, down around Santa's Mountain. There are elves working in the line. There is a Santa up above. You can also see that there is a candy cane archway that leads into some silver hanging tassels that seems like it leads into a little back room. Where exactly are you wanting to go?

**Kim:** Where were we seeing the gurney being led away from? That back room?

**Rev:** No. By the time you all saw it, it had kind of made its way closer to the door.

**Kim:** Okay. I think even so, like, I don't ... Oof. I'm very wary talking about anyone dying in front of, like, an active line filled with children.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Kim:** So I think I'm gonna wander to one of the back rooms, if I can.

**Rev:** Yeah. You slip into the back room, and there is a table and there is a Santa Claus on a cot asleep, and there are a couple of elves eating. And a pair of them get up and go out. But there is one woman left in here, and she's kind of looking down and writing on a notepad.

**Kim:** "Hey. Hi. Sorry. Hi. Sorry to bother you. I know that you're on your break. I'm very sorry."

**Rev:** ELF: Oh, the costumes are in the second hallway.

**Kim:** "Oh, me? No. Well ..." [Laughs] "Thank you. No, I'm not here for a job."

**Rev:** ELF: Oh.

**Kim:** "I couldn't help but notice an elf getting taken out on a gurney a little bit ago?"

**Rev:** ELF: Yeah.

**Kim:** "Do you happen to know anything about that?"

**Rev:** ELF: Yeah, that was ... That was Austin. They said he had a heart attack.

**Kim:** "Jesus. I'm sorry."

**Rev:** ELF: Just like back here on his break, and heart attack. Yeesh.

**Kim:** "God. You didn't see it or anything, did you?"

**Rev:** ELF: No, but I ... I heard him.

**Kim:** "Heard him? Was he saying something?"

**Rev:** ELF: He was talking. He was like ... I don't know if he was, like, muttering to himself. I just — I heard him screaming. "No, no, no." And then, you know, we came back here to see what was going on, and ... And he was just dead.

**Kim:** "Jesus."

**Rev:** ELF: Right.

**Kim:** "What's your name? Sorry. Manners."

**Rev:** ADDY: Addy.

**Kim:** "Addy, hi. Addy, I'm Kim."

**Rev:** ADDY: Hello.

**Kim:** "Okay, I'm gonna be honest with you because I don't like lying. I can see the future. That sounds ... That sounds wild, I know. But just trust me, I can. And I had a vision of some really bad stuff happening in the mall in just a couple of hours, and I think it's tied to whatever killed your friend. I don't think it was a heart attack, or at least not one that had a normal occurrence."

**Rev:** ADDY: He ... Just to be clear, was not my friend. He was into some bad stuff that he was always bragging about. I would not be friends with someone who gets on the phone and scams old people out of their money.

**Kim:** "Oh shit. So he was kind of a piece of shit."

**Rev:** ADDY: Yeah, like he was always doing that like, "Oh, you know, wire transfer us this much money because your grandson is in prison."

**Kim:** Oh, Jesus.

**Rev:** ADDY: Or, you know, "Oh, your insurance is up, but we can renew it for this amount of money."

**Kim:** You said that he died right in here?

**Rev:** ADDY: Yeah.

**Kim:** "Okay." I want to get down on my knees. "I apologize. You're maybe about to see some weird stuff. My eyes are gonna flash really bright, but it's ... It's all good. You're not in any danger. It just might look kind of strange." And I want to touch the ground and try to see if I can investigate what happened.

**Rev:** Yeah. Since you are using the area — like the event obviously has passed, but I think this kicks into your Psychometry. So roll Investigate a Mystery.

**Kim:** Nine.

**Rev:** All right. You get a hold 1.

**Kim:** Well, I'm gonna ask my free one first. What happened here?

**Rev:** You are next to him. He is kneeling on the ground and looking in front of him, muttering ...

**Rev:** AUSTIN: No. No, no, no.

**Rev:** And he turns back, and he looks over his shoulder at something that you can't see. It just seems like empty air. But he is talking, and he starts to plead.

**Rev:** AUSTIN: I didn't think it would hurt people that badly. Please, please tell me it can't be like this.

**Rev:** And he turns back again on his knees looking at this area, and you can see that he starts clutching at his chest and his breathing becomes labored. It seems like something scared him to death.

**Kim:** What could fix it, cure it, or slow it down?

**Rev:** The vision that Tass described to you about something being corrupted. You can feel it in the air. Something has happened here. Some magic. But it's wrong. So if you could either remove what has happened, or do it correctly. And they would be very different outcomes. But both of those things would solve the problem.

**Kim:** Okay. My vision clears. I look at the elf. "Weird, right?"

**Rev:** ADDY: Yeah.

**Kim:** "Yeah. Do you believe me now?"

**Rev:** ADDY: Is that like LED contacts, or something?

**Kim:** "Sure isn't. I really do see the future, I promise."

**Rev:** ADDY: That's pretty rad.

**Kim:** "Thank you." [Laughs] "All right, okay. So I'm gonna go reconvene with the rest of my team, and try to see if we can put a stop to this. Hey, when does your ... When do you finish your shift, out of curiosity?"

**Rev:** ADDY: Oh, I'm not done until the end of tonight. But my break's almost over. I gotta go back out.

**Kim:** "Oh, shit. Okay. Well, I will ... I'll see you out there."

**Rev:** ADDY: Wait, why? Wait, you said you see the future. Do I die?

**Kim:** "No! Well ...."

**Rev:** ADDY: Are you lying to me?

**Kim:** "I promised that I wouldn't lie. If we don't prevent whatever is about to happen, then I think everyone is going to die at midnight. And I'd really love for that to not happen."

**Rev:** ADDY: Oh.

**Kim:** "Yep."

**Rev:** ADDY: Maybe I can take my last brick at the end, so I can leave 15 minutes early.

**Kim:** "I think that would be a really good idea, yeah."

**Rev:** And she turns and walks back out into the waiting group.

**Jake:** Oh, what a bleak commentary on being a fucking retail employee in the US.

**Megan:** Oh, yep.

**Rev:** Yeah. Speaking of bleak outlook, back outside. Tass, you see this woman approaching you in a very nice suit and a long coat.

**Rev:** AGENT BEASLEY: Who are you?

**Tass:** "Hi. Tass Allgood." And I offer a hand to shake.

**Rev:** She shakes it.

**Rev:** AGENT BEASLEY: And you're with the FBI?

**Tass:** "I am." And as I'm talking to her, like I have my hand, like, resting on my chest, sort of. Just trying to, you know, seem casual. And I'm tapping my thumb, and I'm very specifically, over and over again tapping I-P-T in Morse code on my chest.

**Rev:** This is one of the few times where I wrote out the entire mystery. I would like you to see the tag that Beasley has.

**Tass:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** "Skeptic" is her role in this mystery.

**Tass:** Can't wait. Love it. Perfect.

**Rev:** You see that she notices what you're tapping, and she looks at you.

**Rev:** AGENT BEASLEY: So what exactly do you want? There's no boogeymen here. There's no werewolves to stab.

**Tass:** "Oof. Okay. You're not the Mulder and Scully of the FBI over here, huh?"

**Rev:** AGENT BEASLEY: Yeah. Do you have a sense of what level of felony it is to impersonate an FBI agent?

**Kim:** [Quietly] Oh, boy ...

**Tass:** "Yes, I do."

**Megan:** [Laughs] I've done it many times.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Tass:** "I'm just trying to follow up with my division of the agency to see if there's anything to report back. Standard stuff. Take a look, report in. Get out of your hair."

**Rev:** AGENT BEASLEY: Well we've done the first two steps, so now you can do the third.

**Tass:** "I mean, it seems like I'm gonna have to do all the heavy lifting in this case already. So, yeah. What's the third, to your perception?"

**Rev:** AGENT BEASLEY: Get out of my hair.

**Tass:** "All right, fine. Have a lovely day. A lot of bad stuff is probably about to happen, and you're gonna feel like a real asshole if you're not actually helping to prevent it."

**Rev:** AGENT BEASLEY: Is that a threat?

**Tass:** "It's — no, it's not a threat. You feeling like an asshole is probably already the case, so I'm just predicting the future."

**Kim:** [Laughs] You are gonna get arrested!

**Megan:** Is that a threat? No, it's a promise.

**Rev:** [Laughs]

**Jake:** No cell can hold him.

**Rev:** She looks at you for a long moment, and she turns and heads back inside.

**Tass:** "What are you looking at, Tweedledee?"

**Rev:** FBI AGENT: A guy I can't believe it didn't get arrested just now.

**Tass:** I kind of lean in. "Honestly, it's just about, like, projecting a little swagger. I'm terrified right now, dude."

**Rev:** FBI AGENT: Yeah.

**Tass:** "All right. We cool?"

**Rev:** FBI AGENT: I guess.

**Tass:** "Hey, seriously? There is some fucked up stuff about to go down in here."

**Rev:** FBI AGENT: You can't start sentences with that first part. It sounds like you're making threats.

**Tass:** "I know! But like, I'm just telling you the case. Like, I'm not about to do the stuff. I'm trying to stop the stuff. I'm not trying to do the stuff. I'm trying to stop the stuff."

**Rev:** FBI AGENT: Lead with, "We want to stop the stuff. Bad stuff's gonna happen."

**Tass:** "Let me — let me start over."

**Rev:** FBI AGENT: Okay. Jesus.

**Tass:** "Help us stop the fucked up stuff."

**Rev:** FBI AGENT: What — what stuff?

**Tass:** "We're trying to figure it out. I'm trying to see the body to see exactly what happened, but you guys won't ... I'm gonna go check in with my team. Just, if y'all are staying here, stay frosty and be ready to help. Please. For the love of God, What's your name?"

**Rev:** FBI AGENT: Tass Allgood.

**Rev:** He holds up a badge. [Laughs]

**Tass:** [Yelps]

**Jake:** [Laughs]

**Tass:** I shoot him.

**Rev:** He holds up an FBI badge.

**Megan:** He morphs into you.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Rev:** He high fives you. Um ...

**Megan:** He's a clone that came back.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Rev:** AGENT CLARK: Clark.

**Tass:** "Okay. Agent Clark."

**Rev:** Back inside the food courts, everybody's kind of in different locations. What's going on? Where are you people?

**Kim:** [Laughs]

**Jake:** I think probably since Megan had line of sight on the security office, what she sees as me coming out and, like, kind of waving my hands and pointing to whatever, like, service hallway the mall owner ran down.

**Megan:** I see Jake waving his arms around and I open up a chat room. [Telepathically] "Hey, nice dance. What's going on?"

**Jake:** [Telepathically] "Apparently, the mall owner is here and was like running around in a frenzy. He came out of one of the service hallways, ran into the bookstore a couple of doors down, snagged something, and ran back in. So I'm gonna go try and find him and figure out what's going on. When you guys — when the rest of them get back to you, come find me or check the bookstore or whatever. I feel like that's gotta be relevant."

**Megan:** [Telepathically] "Yeah, that sounds good. Be careful. Is the security guard okay?"

**Jake:** [Telepathically] "Yeah, I got him to turn off the TVs, so hopefully he's square."

**Megan:** [Telepathically] "Hopefully. All right. Sounds good. We'll see you soon."

**Rev:** All right. So Jake, you head down the hallway, down the escalator again, and to this service entrance. What exactly are you — are you doing? Are you just walking through like you're supposed to be here? Are you ...

**Jake:** Yeah, I've got my security badge clipped on.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Jake:** And yes, I'm just walking through here like I'm supposed to be here, and trying to keep an eye out for evidence of where he came from or went to.

**Rev:** As you head back through these double doors, it's very dark back here. And there are a lot of hallways. And you can hear some stuff moving around, down some of these hallways.

**Jake:** I want to head kind of cautiously towards the sounds. My objective is to get to a place where I can Use Magic to, like, view another time.

**Rev:** Hmm.

**Jake:** And see where exactly he went or what exactly did. But I don't feel like I'd get useful info from right here.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Jake:** So I'm hoping that whatever the sound is, I might get useful info from over there.

**Rev:** Yeah. So you start heading down this hallway towards the sound, and there is a stuffed bear sitting in the middle of the hallway when you get there. And it slowly stands up and turns and looks at you, and starts to rush at you.

**Jake:** I don't suppose there's any chance that it's coming in for a hug?

**Rev:** Why don't you roll Read a Bad Situation?

**All:** [Laugh]

**Jake:** Ten.

**Rev:** All right, you get a hold 3.

**Jake:** What's the biggest threat?

**Rev:** Not the bear. You heard more noise than what you think a stuffed bear would make. You hear some larger movement up above you in like the pipes running along this hallway.

**Jake:** What's most vulnerable to me?

**Rev:** The stuffed bear. It's ... [Laughs]

**Megan:** Filled with stuffing?

**Rev:** Filled with stuffing.

**Jake:** Asked and answered.

**Rev:** Yeah, it's ... It doesn't seem like it has really any strong way to hurt you.

**Jake:** [Laughs] This is going to be adorable.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Tass:** If it gets up in your mouth though, that's ...

**Jake:** [Choking noises]

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Tass:** [Laughs]

**Jake:** What's the best way to protect the victims?

**Rev:** Who are the victims, in this case?

**Jake:** I think the shoppers. Like it seems like there is some looming force that's going to be terrible. I assume the sentient stuffed bear is related. So do I have any idea of how to protect them from this?

**Rev:** Yeah. Destroy the things that have become sentient.

**Jake:** Simple enough. Kind of sad. If this bear can't really hurt me, it could just be like a fun ... Fun little friend. Little pet.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Jake:** It's like those goats that headbutt you.

**Rev:** Yes.

**Jake:** I'm gonna shoot it with lightning.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Rev:** Yeah. Roll Kick Some Ass.

**Jake:** Okay. Five. Well, six. Because I have +1 hold from Read a Bad Situation, but that's not any better.

**Megan:** Do you guys hear about Jake? No, what? He got killed by a bear.

**Jake:** Oh, my god, that's terrible. Yeah, like — well, like a teddy bear. Oh.

**Megan:** That's worse. [Laughs]

**Rev:** This bear runs up to you and wraps its arms around your leg. And as soon as it makes contact, you are no longer in a hallway. You are standing outside of the IPT, and it is above ground again, and it is just crumbling and in shambles. And above, you can see that the sun is slowly dimming. That something is draining the energy from it. Around you are all of the Chosen weapons and all of the weapons of the various gods, and they are shattered and broken. And there is this sense of deep loneliness, that you are the only one left alive. Megan, you have just told Jake to be careful. And I think you see Kim coming out of the back room of Santa's Mountain, and Tass coming into the door that leads into the food court.

**Kim:** A small addition. Could I have put on an elf costume?

**Rev:** Yeah. She absolutely told you where they were.

**Kim:** Yeah.

**Tass:** "Hey — oh, okay. Going undercover. Nice."

**Kim:** "Yeah, thanks. You know, if the IPT stuff doesn't work out, think I could maybe get a second job."

**Tass:** "Mmhmm, mmhmm."

**Megan:** I just have a slushy, and I wave them over. And I kind of, like, pause for a second and, like, realize that I do have the right person. I didn't mistakenly wave over an elf.

**Kim:** "Hey. So Megan, were you able to get contact with whatever's causing this?"

**Megan:** "Yeah, it's not really like a single creature. It's just kind of like a blanket over the whole place. It's trying to kind of attack people based on vices? Like that's what it's attracted to. So I think maybe that's the manifestations, in your vision is like the things that they're indulging in."

**Tass:** I put the Cinnabon down that I had grabbed on the way in.

**Kim:** The entire tray of free samples that you took.

**Tass:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** "And Jake went up and talked to a security guard, and said that there was something weird with the owner of the mall? I guess he showed up and ran into a bookstore and then ran back into a service hallway. Jake's checking that out now. We should probably check in with him, but also maybe check out that bookstore?"

**Kim:** "Yeah. Yeah, that's a good idea. What you just said about vices fits in with at least the elf that we saw on the gurney. Apparently, he was into some pretty terrible stuff, like calling up people and pretending to be their long lost relatives or, like, you know, money scams. Like bad shit. And I had a vision of his final moments. I didn't see what was terrorizing him, but definitely he saw something, and it literally scared him to death."

**Tass:** "Oof."

**Megan:** "That sounds like some Scrooge stuff, right? Like, look at how bad things are. Or is that ... No, that's It's a Wonderful — I don't know. I get all the Christmas things mixed up. That's like a bad thing, right? Like, 'look at how bad things could be.'"

**Kim:** "I guess. But in those stories, they had the opportunity to change their ways."

**Tass:** "Yeah. Okay. Yeah, that's true. But ..."

**Megan:** "Tass, you said something was, like, broken or something, right?"

**Tass:** "Exactly, yeah. If everything's corrupted, then we might be on track here."

**Kim:** "Yeah. So also, about that. I think if we can find what was corrupted and either fix it or destroy it outright, it would prevent whatever's gonna go down at midnight."

**Tass:** "Okay. Oh, my god. Did somebody try to set up, like, Christmas joy magic and mess it up?"

**Kim:** "I have no idea."

**Tass:** "Oh, my god. Oh. Point of interest, too, as we go. FBI is here and checking shit out. I did not get a look at the body, but it looks like you found out more about how that worked anyway, so not too bad."

**Megan:** "Why is the FBI here?"

**Tass:** "I have no idea. But she's not messing around. She got the message that I'm IPT and did not entertain us as, you know, something legitimate. I said fine, have a nice day, and left. And I think she's probably gonna be watching us."

**Kim:** "Cool. Good to know. At least you didn't say anything like really threatening to her or anything, so."

**Tass:** "Mmhmm."

**Jake:** [Laughs]

**Kim:** "Bookstore?"

**Tass:** "Bookstore."

**Megan:** "Yeah. If you guys want to check out the bookstore, I'll go find Jake. I know which direction he headed." And I point upstairs. "I think he said it was a bookstore, just like a couple of down from that one?"

**Tass:** "Oh yeah, I know it. Okay."

**Megan:** "All right. Well, I'll find him and meet up with the guys later."

**Tass:** "All right. Be careful."

**Kim:** "Okay."

**Rev:** All right, So let's follow Kim and Tass as they go up to this bookstore. You go up the escalator and head the direction that Megan indicated, and you see a bookstore called Morgana's Apothecary.

**Tass:** "Oh, god. Yep. This is the one I thought."

**Kim:** "This is cute."

**Tass:** "Yeah, it's cool stuff. I'm just afraid there is maybe, like, a real actual book of magic in here that got abused, and now I have just a real big sense of dread."

**Kim:** "Well, the good news is that whoever runs this place might be a believer. We might have an easier time of talking to them."

**Tass:** "That's fair." And I'll head in.

**Rev:** You head in. And there is a small chime that goes off when you pass through the doorway. And a woman with long curly hair and dark skin leans out from around the corner.

**Rev:** MORGANA: Hi. Can I help you?

**Kim:** "I don't suppose you're Morgana, are you?"

**Rev:** MORGANA: I am.

**Kim:** "Hi."

**Rev:** MORGANA: Hello.

**Kim:** "Nice to meet you."

**Rev:** MORGANA: Nice to meet you as well.

**Tass:** "This sounds like a weird question. We're kind of investigators. We heard from somebody that the owner of the mall came through here a little while ago. Do you remember that?"

**Rev:** MORGANA: Yes, Mr. Hart. He came in here. He seemed very flustered by something. He ran around a bit and chattered at me over his shoulder and then left.

**Tass:** "Okay. Did he, like, take anything?"

**Rev:** MORGANA: He didn't buy anything, no.

**Tass:** "He didn't buy anything. Oh, gosh. I hope he didn't steal anything."

**Rev:** MORGANA: Really?

**Tass:** "I mean, I hope. We've heard a similar thing, that he just seemed very frenzied and out of sorts. And so we were hoping to follow up, see if he said anything that caught your ear."

**Rev:** MORGANA: No, he just seemed like he was checking in with me about the rent, and if I planned on staying here. It was all idle talk, really.

**Kim:** "Really, okay. Didn't say anything about, like, what happened downstairs in Santa Mountain? The elf that ..."

**Rev:** MORGANA: Oh, no, no. This happened well before that.

**Kim:** "How long before?"

**Rev:** MORGANA: Oh, maybe around 4:00, 5:00 is when he came through here.

**Kim:** "Gotcha."

**Rev:** MORGANA: I'll be quite honest. Now you've got me curious about whether he stole something. Why would he steal something from me? I already pay him rent to use this space.

**Rev:** And she starts heading down one of the aisles of bookshelves.

**Rev:** MORGANA: He was mostly down here, and just looked like he was doing laps. But I did notice that he stopped here — I'll be damned.

**Kim:** "What? Is there something missing?"

**Rev:** MORGANA: There is. There, right here, there's a gap. There's normally something facing out here. Um ...

**Rev:** And she looks down at the wood, and ...

**Rev:** MORGANA: Just let me check to see here.

**Rev:** And she heads back to the counter and pulls up her computer.

**Rev:** MORGANA: Yes. I had a translated version of The Rite of Exorcism there. And it's not there any longer.

**Tass:** "Okay ..."

**Kim:** "You don't happen to have another copy of that book, do you?"

**Rev:** MORGANA: Not translated, no. I have the Latin.

**Kim:** "I speak a little bit of Latin."

**Rev:** MORGANA: Oh, can I interest you in a copy?

**Kim:** "Yeah. How much? It doesn't matter." I throw down Strohm's credit card.

**Megan:** It doesn't matter. I take it and run.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Rev:** Yeah, she scans the card and sells you a copy of The Rite of Exorcism.

**Tass:** All right. Well hey, sorry to bother you. We're gonna follow up on this. If we find that book, we'll return it."

**Rev:** MORGANA: Oh, okay. If not, I'm ... I'm gonna take the amount it costs out of my next month's rent.

**Tass:** "I think you're entitled to that and more."

**Rev:** MORGANA: Thank you.

**Jake:** [Laughs]

**Megan:** You're hired.

**Rev:** MORGANA: I was confused by the "more," but ... Well, I like the cut of your jib.

**Tass:** "Thank you."

**Jake:** I don't know what you meant by it, but I agree with it. I know what I mean by it, and you're correct.

**Rev:** MORGANA: I know what I'm worth, and it's way more than that book.

**Jake:** I'm closing right now!

**Rev:** MORGANA: I'll kill him!

**Megan:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** [Laughs]

**Tass:** Bring me the book and his hand.

**Kim:** Fucking love her.

**Jake:** Pulls a shotgun from under the counter.

**Megan:** Pulls the grate down. I'm coming with you.

**Rev:** MORGANA: We're doing this.

**Kim:** "Thanks. It was nice to meet you. This store is really cute. I will definitely be back here to do more browsing the stuff. This is exactly the sort of shit that I'm into."

**Rev:** MORGANA: Oh, thank you.

**Kim:** "Yeah."

**Rev:** Jake. As you are looking down at all of these broken weapons, the Chosen weapons, the weapons of the gods, you notice that your hands are bandaged, but they

are just bleeding through. You can tell you have tried to wield all of these weapons to defend everyone who is now gone. You have a -1 ongoing for toughness right now.

**Jake:** OK. Do I ... Do I remember that I was in a hallway a moment ago, or am I like lost in this scenario?

**Rev:** I'm gonna ask you to roll a custom move.

**Jake:** OK.

**Rev:** This move is called More Gravy than Grave. When trapped in a vision caused by the Vacant Seat, roll +Cool. On a hit, hold 1. On a full success, hold 3. On a fail, you are held fast in the vision. So roll +Cool.

**Jake:** Okay. My bad one. Four.

**Rev:** You are building the story backwards of how you got here. Like you cannot think back to how you were in the hallway and led to this moment, but you're starting to generate a story for yourself that leads you back to a point where it's believable. Megan, you come back into this hallway and after looking down a few of the halls, you see Jake standing stock still. There is a bear wrapped around his leg just nuzzling it, and there is a cord hanging down from the ceiling that has wrapped around his neck.

**Megan:** "Jake?"

**Rev:** He does not respond, but the bear leans away from him and starts moving down the hallway towards you with its arms out.

**Megan:** "No. No, no."

**Rev:** Faster and faster.

**Megan:** [Laughs]

**Tass:** It gets down on all fours.

**All:** [Laughs]

**Kim:** Yes!

**Megan:** Like a real bear.

**Tass:** Yep.

**Megan:** I think instinctually, I'm just going to unleash energy at it. I'm gonna just try and attack it with my powers.

**Rev:** All right, roll Kick Some Ass.

**Megan:** Twelve.

**Rev:** All right. What is your extra effect?

**Megan:** I think I'm gonna inflict terrible harm. [Laughs]

**Rev:** You said you were releasing energy. This goes off of your Big Whammy move. How much damage does that do?

**Megan:** That would be 2-harm, close, obvious, ignore armor.

**Rev:** OK. And so 3, now.

**Megan:** Yeah, so 3-harm all together.

**Rev:** You let out this blast of energy, and it rolls down the hallway and pulps this bear. It turns into stuffing that just slowly drifts back down onto the ground. As it falls on the ground, you're looking at it and there's far too much of it. And you look back up, and you realize that you're standing outside and it's snowing. And you're outside of your grandpa's home, but it's cold and it's empty. You have a chill over your entire body. I think you have a -1 ongoing to your Tough as well, because these shakes and shivers have come over you. I think that with your full success on that attack and seeing Jake

standing there in kind of a stupor, you know something is off. So you can roll More Gravy than Grave, and you're gonna have a +2 to it.

**Megan:** Okay. Eleven.

**Rev:** All right. So on a full success, you get a hold 3. And here are the options for what you can spend your hold on: you can shake off the physical ramification of your vision, you can see the world around you as it really is again, the next time you're caught in a vision from the Vacant Seat you can roll with advantage, you can remove the animating force from ill whims in your immediate area, or you can pull a teammate or bystander out of their vision.

**Megan:** Okay. I definitely want to see the world as it is.

**Rev:** This vision does clear away from you, and you can see yourself very clearly in the hallway you were in just moments ago.

**Megan:** I think knowing that this is fake and having been pulled out of it now, I'm gonna shake off the physical ramifications of kind of centering myself psychologically.

**Rev:** Yeah. So clear that -1 ongoing to Toughness.

**Megan:** And I'm gonna pull Jake out of his vision.

**Rev:** Jake, you are standing back in the hallway, and you can feel something tight around your neck. And you still feel sore, a little weakened, but you are not stuck in this vision anymore. You're back in the hallway that you were kind of constructing a story to work your way back to in your head.

**Jake:** I want to try and get this thing off my neck.

**Rev:** Roll Act Under Pressure.

**Jake:** Snake eyes! My god!

**Kim:** You're gonna level up again.

**Jake:** I'm at three!

**Rev:** No, you were mistaken. The hallway might be the fake part. And this end of the world and the broken weapons is the reality. It's hard to tell.

**Jake:** Can I try to cling to that? Like I know that I'm waffling back and forth on what is reality or not, but can I try to like, basically will the hallway to be the reality?

**Rev:** Yeah. Why don't you roll More Gravy than Grave again?

**Jake:** Yeah, why not? Why don't I?

**Rev:** See if we can get you leveled up in this holiday special.

**Jake:** Haha! Ten.

**Rev:** All right, you get a hold 3.

**Jake:** Okay. I want to see the world as it actually is, I want to shake off the physical ramification, and I want to remove the animating force of ill whims in my area.

**Rev:** All right. You are back in the hallway. It is real. And you have shaken off that pained feeling in your hand. So your -1 ongoing to Toughness is gone. And behind you, a very heavy vacuum cleaner falls out of the ceiling and slams on the ground, shattering — its cord pulling back into its handle.

**Jake:** I think I like look at Megan, and like put hands on like both of her shoulders and just like the middle of her face. Like I'm like, "Oh my god, are you — are you real?"

**Megan:** Smack his hand away. "Yes, I'm real. What was that?"

**Jake:** I don't know. I feel like I've been fighting for weeks. I feel like — it feels like the world ended, and this happened so long ago."

**Megan:** "No, Jake. You just came down here to look for the mall owner."

**Jake:** "Oh, my god. I don't know. I don't know. Something ... Something took my mind."

**Megan:** "There was a bear holding onto your leg, and then it chased me, and —"

**Jake:** "Yeah, the bear!"

**Megan:** "Yeah, I exploded — this is — I exploded it. This is all of it on the ground right now. But yeah, I also got pulled into, like, a vision. Like I was back home and it was snowing outside, and I was really cold. I could feel it felt real, but I pulled myself out of it."

**Jake:** "So is it the things? Did the things do this? Was it the bear? The bear hugged me, and it seems like that's the last real thing I remember."

**Megan:** "I exploded it and then went into the vision. So I don't know if it's because its, like, stuffing touched me or if it got hands on me before. But for some reason I was still affected, even though this thing had been blown up."

**Rev:** And I think that as you're saying this to Jake, you're turning back down the hallway that you came down, and at your feet are three little army men. And they are all on their sides not moving, but they're precariously around the heel of your foot like they might have been touching you.

**Megan:** "Oh, geez! I must have stepped on these guys. Or they stepped on me, or something."

**Jake:** "Boy, I don't know what exactly these are, but they are around and they're going to cause problems for more people."

**Megan:** "Okay, then we've gotta stop this. Did you find anything about where the owner went?"

**Jake:** "No, I was just following the sounds in here when I got snagged. I didn't make it any further."

**Megan:** "Okay, well Tass and Kim are checking out the bookstore upstairs."

**Rev:** Yeah, and I think about this time as the two of you are standing here discussing this, Tass and Kim do come around the corner. It didn't take them very long to get this book.

**Megan:** "Ah! Oh, sorry. I thought you were a stuffed bear."

**Kim:** "What?"

**Tass:** "God, I'm not that hairy."

**Megan:** "No, there's just — there's things that are alive, and they put you in visions. And I just — we didn't think anyone else was down here."

**Tass:** "What?"

**Kim:** "You told us to meet you here!"

**Megan:** "Yeah, I know, but I didn't expect any other things like vacuum cleaners and stuffed bears and army men. You just spooked me, is all."

**Kim:** "Yeah. Slow down. What happened?"

**Jake:** "There's some misfit toys shit going on. I got hugged by a stuffed bear and strangled by a fucking vacuum cleaner, and it threw me into a vision where I've been stuck for weeks. And I guess it got Megan too, when she came in here. I don't know actually how long it's been in reality."

**Tass:** "Have we found the owner yet?"

**Jake:** "I haven't made it a step past here."

**Kim:** "The book he stole was a translated book on exorcisms."

**Jake:** "So this is demonic?"

**Kim:** "It's possible he thinks so. But he stole it a couple of hours before we got here and that elf died."

**Jake:** "Weird. He was awfully frazzled already by then."

**Megan:** "He obviously knows something that we don't, so we've gotta find him."

**Jake:** I think I might actually, at this point, like being gun shy on moving further down this hallway because I just got yoinked, I might now just try to Use Magic to see if I can glean anything from here.

**Rev:** Oh, okay.

**Jake:** Because like I was like, "Oh, I'm gonna get closer and find better info." And now I'm like, you know what? Fuck that. I'll see what I can get from right here where it's safer.

**Rev:** All right. Yeah. Roll Use Magic.

**Jake:** With my brand new move, that brings it barely to a seven.

**Rev:** All right, so what is your effect and what is your glitch?

**Jake:** I want to observe another place or time.

**Rev:** OK.

**Jake:** I think the glitch is that I take 1-harm, ignore armor.

**Rev:** Okay.

**Jake:** Because I think I'm already — I'm spent, physically.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Jake:** I think this takes more of a toll on me than I would have expected it to.

**Rev:** So this image springs up to life around you, and you see the owner run past. And then there's a little bit of time passage, and he runs back past the other way. But you notice that he is slowing down as he runs past the other way. Like when he was running out, he was running at full speed. But for the most part, you can run at full speed from takeoff. He is slowing down. And just barely at the edge of your vision, you can see him going over to a wall and doing something with it. And then it seems like he vanishes from that spot.

**Jake:** "There's like a secret passage in the wall over here."

**Kim:** "What?"

**Jake:** "Look at this." And I'm like gesturing to the part of the vision here where he's at a wall. I'm like, fast forwarding, rewinding. Where it's just like, he's there, he's not, he's there, he's not.

**Rev:** Yeah. And this is kind of like right at the edge of your vision. So you can see that he is messing with something, and then he steps through the wall. But your vision kind of ends where the wall is, so you can't exactly see what's going on with the wall.

**Jake:** Yeah.

**Kim:** "Well, if we go over to the wall, I could maybe touch it and see if I could get a vision of him activating the secret passage?"

**Jake:** Let's just solve this whole thing with back to back visions. Just ...

**Kim:** Fuck yeah.

**Jake:** Chain visions. We don't miss a second.

**Kim:** [Laughs] I just head over to the wall.

**Rev:** Yeah, you head over to the wall and you can see a couple of different scuff marks and some spots where it seems like it would be big enough to get a key inside of.

**Kim:** Interesting. Can I touch one of those spots and try to use Psychometry?

**Rev:** Yeah. Roll Investigate a Mystery.

**Kim:** Nine.

**Rev:** You get a hold 1.

**Kim:** My free one. What happened here?

**Rev:** Yes, there is absolutely a hidden door here. You can very clearly get the sense that he had a key that was used here that opens up part of this wall. It just seems like granite right now. But you can tell that the key does something to make it so you can pass through.

**Kim:** What is being concealed here?

**Jake:** There is a lot of frenzied movement that Jake had watched from Mr. Hart. And while it was pretty much a beeline out of this hidden place to the bookstore and back, it seems like he stuffed his pockets with some other stuff on the way. Because you can see little bits of road salt and some silver tinsel in this flash that you get. That like it wasn't just the key that he was holding. It wasn't just the book. But you get the feeling of large chunks of salt and the prickliness and the smoothness of Christmas tree tinsel.

**Kim:** Interesting. Okay. "Well, perhaps busting through the wall is the right idea. Hart used a key to get in here. But not only that, he was coming in with what seemed like spell or ritual components. Like salt or pieces of Christmas tinsel. Like a lot of it."

**Tass:** "All right. So he's up to something for sure. I mean, what do you guys think? I can try to pick this thing? I can literally try to just charge through it. I can maybe shoot it down."

**Jake:** "I mean, picking it's going to make the least noise."

**Tass:** "I can sure try."

**Megan:** "Yeah. Let's start there."

**Rev:** Yeah. Tass, roll Act Under Pressure.

**Tass:** Okay. Eight.

**Rev:** So you can get this open, but it's gonna take some time. Or, it's going to make more noise than you thought. Or, it's going to be jammed once you open it — like it won't be able to close.

**Tass:** I think it's gonna make a little noise.

**Rev:** Okay. This granite wall slowly swings open, and behind it is another door. A metal door. But it is ... [Laughs]

**Tass:** Son of a bitch!

**Megan:** This one's locked too.

**Jake:** It is ... It is also locked.

**Kim:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** It has three key holes. And behind it is another door made of metal, but you can see that it actually just slides.

**Tass:** Okay. I'll step up and get this door open.

**Rev:** You slide the door open, and instantly hear the sound of a shotgun cocking. And you open the door, and there is a gun pointed at you.

**Tass:** "Hey, buddy."

**Rev:** MR. HART: Hey, get out of here!

**Tass:** "Now — now, look."

**Rev:** MR. HART: I said get out of here!

**Tass:** "I — listen. Usually, usually this is a situation where I would step back because there's a shotgun in my face, and you seem a little wired. But I'm a friend, and we're gonna help with whatever's going on, Mr ... Hart?"

**Rev:** MR. HART: How'd you — hmm, are you one of them?

**Tass:** "I don't know who they are. And I would love to answer this question for you."

**Rev:** MR. HART: This seems like a trick. How many of you are there?

**Tass:** "There are four of us. I have a little team. I have three buddies. Wave. Buddies, wave. There's a shotgun in my face. And we don't like that."

**Jake:** "I'm a buddy." And I wave.

**Megan:** "Hi, Mr. Hart. Merry Christmas."

**Kim:** I hold up the book. "I think you and I are fans of the same book."

**Rev:** MR. HART: It's not working. It's bullshit.

**Tass:** "Hey, here we go. This is what we're — hey, we're on a — we're on a thing here. This is good. If something's not working with this stuff, we are definitely buddies. We are friends. We want to help."

**Rev:** MR. HART: What, you can fix it?

**Tass:** "Maybe. Very, very maybe."

**Rev:** MR. HART: This book said that if I did these things the way that it's described in the book, that it would keep away spirits.

**Tass:** "Oh-kay. Can we come take a look?"

**Rev:** MR. HART: Four of you?

**Tass:** "Yeah."

**Rev:** MR. HART: All right.

**Tass:** "Unless you — if you would prefer it to be a different number."

**Rev:** MR. HART: No!

**Tass:** "Okay."

**Rev:** MR. HART: It better be four of you.

**Tass:** "Okay."

**Kim:** Boy. Yeah.

**Tass:** Four of us.

**Rev:** And he steps back and lets you in. There is an apartment hidden in the center of this mall. It is immaculately decorated. Very plush furniture, beautiful lighting. For someplace in the center of a mall, it's surprising how cozy it feels. But at the center of this hardwood floor, in the middle of this — basically, like a loft — you see a ring of silver Christmas tinsel and another ring of road salt. And around this circle, there are runes drawn on the ground in what seems like chalk, but they're not any runes that you've seen before. It's like if I was like, hey, Tass, draw me some magic runes. And you're just like, okay. And so you just kind of made up some symbols.

**Tass:** Oh, god.

**Rev:** And in the center of this is a writhing specter. They are almost completely transparent and they are covered in chains, and they are opening their mouth to wail. But there is no sound. And at the ends of these chains are bank boxes and locks and large safes.

**Kim:** "Hoo, was not expecting this."

**Jake:** "Did this come to you first, or did this come to you as a result of whatever you tried to do out of that book?"

**Rev:** MR. HART: This came to me first. This — this is my old business partner. And she died. And she visited me today when I was sleeping. And she said that I was gonna be visited by three spirits.

**Jake:** "Okay, Mr. Hart. Would you consider yourself a good man?"

**Rev:** MR. HART: What do you mean? That's the kind of question that she asked.

**Jake:** "Are you familiar with A Christmas Carol?"

**Rev:** MR. HART: Yeah, That's why I went and got the book. I know what happens. I didn't think that stuff was real.

**Jake:** "I didn't think those particular ghosts were necessarily real, but some ghosts are. Do you mind?" And I'll, like, point to the runes.

**Rev:** MR. HART: Can you fix it?

**Jake:** "I can try."

**Rev:** MR. HART: Okay.

**Megan:** "What exactly are you trying to do with all of this?" And I gesture towards the runes and the silver and salt.

**Rev:** MR. HART: Trying to keep her trapped, so that she can't bring those other spirits to visit me.

**Tass:** "Yeah, that ... That makes sense." Does he still have the shotgun?

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Jake:** And it's still pointed. It's been pointed at your nose the whole time.

**Tass:** "Now hear us out. It would seem that some aspect of what's happened here is making bad, bad things happen. Somebody's died. And in order to fix the biggest problem, that means we probably have to tear some of this down."

**Kim:** "Well, either fix it or tear it down. We've got two options here."

**Rev:** MR. HART: What do you mean, tear it down? You can't let her out!

**Tass:** "Was she threatening you?"

**Rev:** MR. HART: Yes!

**Tass:** "Now, I want to ask. Was she threatening your life, or was she threatening to teach you something?"

**Rev:** MR. HART: You said that you could help me.

**Tass:** "I was just asking. I'm just asking. I'm just info gathering."

**Rev:** He cocks the shotgun again, getting rid of a perfectly useful shell.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Rev:** Putting a new one in the chamber.

**Megan:** I want to Jinx him.

**Rev:** Yeah, roll it.

**Megan:** Eight.

**Rev:** All right, you get a hold 1.

**Tass:** I think I'm stepping in front of him directly. Like, directly. And I still have my hands up to the sides.

**Rev:** He starts backing up.

**Tass:** "Hey, just ..."

**Rev:** MR. HART: [Sputters angrily]

**Tass:** "I know this is all very scary. But listen." And I want to snap the gun out of his hand.

**Rev:** You go to snatch the gun out of his hand, and he staggers backwards and falls across the line of salt and silver on the ground. And as soon as he breaks this barrier, you hear this moan erupt from the spirit at the center of the circle. He turns and looks at her in a panic, and she holds up a hand and clenches it shut. And a bright light appears and starts to move towards him.

**Jake:** Can I ... Do I know what this is? Can I observe this? Can I try to figure out if this is ...

**Kim:** Is this bad for all of us or just bad for him?

**Rev:** There's no roll here. You've seen A Christmas Carol. Jacob Marley was specific to Scrooge. Whoever this woman is is specific to Mr. Hart. And she has been freed from this corrupting circle. And she has just called the Ghost of Christmas Past, and it is moving towards Mr. Hart on the ground.

**Jake:** "I don't know if you're gonna thank us for this, but you're gonna come out the other side better."

**Rev:** And the glowing light touches him and he vanishes. The woman in chains looks at all of you.

**Rev:** GHOST: Thank you. It was so painful. I could feel the others trying to get to me. They were being corrupted somehow, lashing out. But all is as it should be now.

**Jake:** I try to snap a picture with my phone, subtly.

**Kim:** I hide the exorcism book behind my back. I don't want to upset her.

**Tass:** "What happens to you now?"

**Rev:** GHOST: I am damned to carry these chains that I forged in life. But if I can aid enough others, others that I knew, in breaking theirs, mine might become lighter.

**Tass:** "Okay. So really, no tricks. You're trying to teach him something."

**Rev:** GHOST: Many don't want to learn until it's too late.

**Tass:** "That's sure true."

**Rev:** You hear wind coming down the corridor around the door and into this room as this woman starts to fade away. And just for a brief moment, you glimpse two other figures that seem to take up position in the corner of this room, one wreathed in garland and the other draped in a long black cloak. They fade back into the shadows. And Tass, your cell phone rings.

**Tass:** "Oh, my god." I answer it.

**Rev:** REV: All right. I got all my shopping done. You guys all set?

**Tass:** "Yeah, bub. Almost done. We're saying goodbye to some friends and we'll come grab you."

**Rev:** REV: Nice.

**Tass:** "Seeing anything else weird down there?"

**Rev:** REV: No.

**Tass:** "Great. Great. Love you, buddy."

**Rev:** REV: See you in a bit.

**Tass:** "Merry Christmas."

**Rev:** REV: Yeah, you too — I'm gonna see you in a second.

**Tass:** "Yeah, I know. Just shut up and take it."

**SFX:** CRITSHOW HOLIDAY STINGER

**Rev:** And that brings us to end of session experience.

**All:** [Cheer]

**Rev:** So did we conclude the current mystery?

**Jake:** Yes.

**Tass:** Yeah.

**Kim:** We did.

**Rev:** Yeah. What was it? What was going on?

**Jake:** Christmas Carol, baby.

**Tass:** Yeah, there was a — there was a like a Grinch scenario inside of a Christmas Carol scenario. Man, his heart, because that's his name, is gonna grow ... We did it.

**Jake:** He's gonna get wicked tall.

**Tass:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** [Laughs]

**Tass:** That Hart grew three sizes.

**Rev:** Did you save someone from certain death or worse?

**Tass:** Many people.

**Megan:** Yeah.

**Kim:** All of the people in the mall, for sure.

**Rev:** Yeah. Everybody here.

**Jake:** Assuming this goes how we think it's going to go, we've saved him from the terrible fate of being a greedy curmudgeon.

**Rev:** Yeah. Monster capitalist.

**Jake:** Yeah.

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

**Tass:** Yeah. That these three ghosts are in this world. Like, they're a story about something real.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Tass:** Love that.

**Rev:** And did we learn something new and important about one of the hunters?

**Tass:** Eh, I can't think of anything profound.

**Rev:** Yeah, that's fair. So everybody gets two points of experience. Does anybody level up?

**Tass:** Yes, I do.

**Jake:** Yup.

**Kim:** [Laughs]

**Rev:** Good lord. What are you gonna take?

**Kim:** Twice in one — in one mystery! In one episode!

**Rev:** Jake, when it comes to you leveling up, the spirits did it all in one night.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Rev:** I wish that was the end. But I need to know what you're going to take, and we need to talk about some other stuff.

**Megan:** This is your Christmas present.

**Rev:** Just imagine that on that joke, we faded out of the episode.

**All:** [Laugh]

**Jake:** Just start to play the theme music and then come right back in. I'm going to take a move from another playbook. From The Initiate, I'm going to take Helping Hand. When you successfully Help Out another hunter, they get +2 instead of the usual +1.

**Rev:** Oh, nice.

**Tass:** And I am boosting my weird from a negative one to a goose egg.

**Rev:** All right. Does anybody have any questions about the mystery or anything you want to know?

**Kim:** What would Tass and I have seen if we had gotten trapped by the Vacant Throne?

**Tass:** Oh ...

**Rev:** So the Vacant Seat is when you are touched by one of the ill whims. The ill whims were the minions in this. As I said, this was a phenomenon. The phenomenon was that a poorly constructed ward was corrupting the presence of the spirits. So the Vacant Seat, which again is a line from A Christmas Carol, is giving the hunters a vision of a future they fear is waiting for them at the end of their days. This creates a physical ramification. And so just kind of off the cuff, I liked the idea of for Jake, it being no matter what weapon it is, what kind of Chosen, god, whatever, that somehow it still doesn't work. That that would be the thing that's kind of his fear at the end of the day, of the story that you're all doing. For Megan, it was the loss of that loved one, of the grandpa and in the cold house it feeling empty and it not being there for her anymore. For Kim, it would have been basically the fall of Strohm again, that it would have been just living that over and over again through every different version of Kims throughout the multiverse. And for Tass, it was going to simply be being the Chosen and not knowing the decision to make when the time came to make that final decision.

**Tass:** Hmm. Mmhmm. Mmhmm. That's it.

**Rev:** So yeah, just little — little in-character stuff that I thought was a good kind of get you caught in a head space. That was all the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The Vacant Seat was his ramification on this. And then the Ghost of Christmas Present was the one who was animating all of the things that people were currently, in a capitalist way, lusting over. So if you had gone through more of the mall, you would have found more various toys and things like that, that people were trying to get that were getting animated with this. They were called ill whims.

**Megan:** Oof.

**Tass:** Man, can you imagine the wall of pop figures?

**Rev:** Oh, lord. And I do want to thank my inspiration for this mystery: probably one of my favorite episodes of The Real Ghostbusters ever, where the real Ghostbusters get called in by Ebenezer Scrooge to bust a ghost, and thus disrupt A Christmas Carol and have to act it out themselves to teach Scrooge the lesson.

**Tass:** Nice. Good pull.

**Rev:** Yeah. I loved Tass tapping out IPT in Morse code.

**Tass:** Man, I was feeling clever on that too.

**Rev:** Yeah.

**Tass:** Like, this is FBI — like she's the boss. She's gonna know what this means. She's going to be it — ah, beans. Oh, no.

**Rev:** Yeah. Well thank you for joining us, everybody. We hope that you have had a safe and happy holiday season, and we will see you next week for the Starhold Q&A.

**Kim:** Happy New Year!

**Tass:** Happy New Year!

**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](http://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](https://Patreon.com/TheCritshow).