

[20:22]Professor Gray had asked for help. Rha had *enthusiastically* asked for help. A TOMB DEEP BENEATH QARN, A LOST WING, HOME OF THE DISGRACED VICEREGENT LORD SHOSHOTEPO. Now with all three gems, he found himself standing in front of a mural--a maiden laid supine upon a dais, with her breast laid bare--and a socket for a gem was upon it. Above her, a priest was driving his dagger towards the site, and it, too, had a socket--behind them both, there stood 'king', with the sun's rays about his head like a crown--

[20:24]Professor Gray on his forehead, there was a *third* socket. The answer to the most simple puzzle in the world, if not for--one complicating factor. In a ring around them, statues, lining the circular chamber, all of them equipped with daggers their own. The shadows they cast seemed to stretch abnormally, bending at impossible angles rather than following the faint slivers of light from cracks above, all converging upon the maiden's heart. Ominous.

[20:24]Professor Gray: "...Well!" Rha said, cheerily! "Here we are!"

[20:24]You motion in welcome.

[20:24]Svana Heart doesn't look like she should be here, or anywhere but a rest bed for that matter. Her left arm held close at her side amidst a tangle of repurposed theatric sashes and brightly colored cloths is a perfect match for her face, abundantly cheerful despite being half covered in deep bruises and petty lacerations. Despite all better judgement she very clearly would rather press on, a toothy grin showing through at least half of a swollen lip as she casts her eyes about the room.

[20:27]★Ruran Vas shifted uneasily. There was an energy of discovery in the air, certainly, yet Ruran could not bring himself to be lifted up into the same revelry. His attention was on the wall, the statues, the shadows--everywhere except the company with him. "Very odd," he murmured beneath his mask, followed by a light flickering at his chest.

[20:28]Professor Gray: "Yeah, it--it's certainly peculiar."

[20:28]Svana Heart remarks with an energy that spites her grim words, "It's a trap!"

[20:41]Professor Gray Ruran sees-- ...a very spooky place. it's OBVIOUSLY dangerous, OBVIOUSLY a trap. But to what end? --The answer is apparent largely in part to *Svana's gear.* As Rha approached to place the gem into the first two slots, nothing happened, but as he reached for the maiden's heart, where shadows converged...the statues--turned. angled, towards him, the shadows shifting to focus on his back, right where *his* heart would be.

[20:41]Professor Gray: "ALright, alright. Let's--see what happens..."

[20:43]Svana Heart abruptly calls out with halting severity, "Nope! Nope, not that. Hold up, Gray."

[20:43]Professor Gray stiffened, hand ilms from the slot. "...Eh?"

[20:43]Svana Heart steps her way across the room and holds out an empty palm, curling fingers impatiently. "Gimme. Step back about two yalms and take a look at where everything lines up."

[20:44]★Ruran Vas watches quietly, canting his head.

[20:45]Professor Gray stalled, looking at Svana incredulously--but he stepped back. as he hesitated, three (THREE) of the statues eyes began to glow. One in the rear, and two to either side of the of the door itself. "WHO AM I!" bellowed the first. "WHO AM I!" bellowed the second. "WHO ARE YOU," bellowed the third.

[20:45]Professor Gray: "I--"

[20:45]Professor Gray: ". . . Of course."

[20:46]Svana Heart concedes a pace in precaution, the hand that reaches towards the handle of her weapon casually swept along through her hair instead.

[20:47]Svana Heart: "Well. That's more of a first impression."

[20:47]★Ruran Vas froze, his attention snapping to each statue in turn. His hand reached for the hilt of his blade and he took a few cautionary steps toward Rha and Svana.

[20:48]Professor Gray: "Yeahp, yeahp, that's right--everyone. Gather up. Are they--are they sapient? I--"

[20:52]Professor Gray || The first statue (A) began to speak. "I have been since the dawn of time. There is nothing that does not fall under my sight; nothing that does heed my authority. The world rests, and the world begins anew by my edicts! I am the FIRST, and the LAST, and all that exists, exists through me!" The second statue (B) began: "I am the knowledge the light brings, and I follow it--wherever it touches, so too am I. And by my knowledge is the blessings of the light carried out." The third, >

[20:53]Professor Gray (C) "YOU are the flower given up to the sun, cultivated by the knowledge of man--and then given back to the earth as thanks, under the sun's watchful eye. By your seed does the next generation come, and by your dew do fields prosper."

[20:53]Professor Gray A: "WHO AM I." B: "WHO AM I." C: "WHO ARE YOU."

[20:57]Professor Gray: ". . . Oh, *c'mon,* really? This is easy. --You two wanna try before I spoil the fun?"

[20:58]★Ruran Vas: "Easy..?"

[20:58]P'tajha Kett || There's the shuffling sound of, well, footsteps, navigating rubble and crumbling stone paths, coming from presumably the direction they'd come, and 'rounding the corner is, for Gray, anyway, a familiar woman, scribbling away in a book like she might've heard the trio of booming riddles and was recording them for posterity.

[20:59]Svana Heart turns about with a thoughtful frown, tapping at her chin bruised and battered chin with a free hand before attempting to shrug along obliviously and very quickly realizing the mistake - shifting her left shoulder so much to gesture as she does provokes a harsh-drawn hiss of pain before she settles it back into a braced sling.

[21:01]Professor Gray: "I would *love* to talk, but I think I'm on the choppin' block. A moment, if you would."

[21:02]★Fiona Delaine: And coming from the corner just behind P'tajha peeks a raven-haired head with shiny blue eyes, almost luminous in the dark. ".. Hello! Is this a bad dad? I mean- bad time!" (Just close by for /say range

[21:02]P'tajha Kett gestures for him to continue, you know, as you do, as though she's really not a concern (she's probably a concern).

[21:02]Svana Heart blinks, a gesture lost behind opaque lenses but obvious all the same by a sudden stall in surprise. "Damn. How cheap were the tickets to this one?"

[21:04]Professor Gray: "--HI, FI! How's it goin! I'm in the middle of somethin', glad you could make it, if--" --The shadows seemed to. thicken, coalesce, accompanied by a sudden cry of pain from Rha, as he took 1-Harm and dropped to his knees. "OKAY-- OKAY OKAY OKAY OKAY OKAY I'LL PLAY! I'LL PLAY! It--IT'S ASKIN' WHO WE ARE. IN THE MURAL. I KNOW THAT MUCH. THERE'S. PROBABLY MORE TO IT, SHIT. "

[21:04]Svana Heart: "Oh, wait. Death curse. Probably need to deal with that before we have a lovely meeting."

[21:04]Professor Gray: "--AND WHO THEY ARE."

[21:04]★Fiona Delaine: "Hi! Um- oh- uh- oh!" Fi hurries into the room, looking around. "I only heard the echoes!"

[21:06]Svana Heart errantly supposes aside in counsel with the group, "What, King priest and maiden? Seems a bit too straight forward."

[21:06]★Ruran Vas stiffened at Rha's pained cry. He glanced between the mural and each statue, but remained shocked into silence.

[21:06]★Fiona Delaine: "Well- try it anyway!"

[21:09]Professor Gray --The daggers of the statues seemed to be attached to a rotating piece, they were likely levers of some sort. Clearly, you're dealing with a death-trap--given the way it

was harming Rha, it was doing exactly what was happening to the maiden in the mural as he'd tried to approach it. *The words the statues spoke* are the key both to deactivating the trap, and unlocking the door.

[21:11]★Fiona Delaine flails a little as she puts hands on Rha and tries to ease off the worst of the Horrible Death Curse if she can. Murmured words and a flutter of silvery light and shimmering threads of blue attempt to salve the necrosis induced by the curse, invigorating drained flesh and leaving the fluttering notes of a sweet song on the tip of the ears. Assuming it works anyway. (HEAL WOUND specialist move! If she can! I'm loopy from oxycodone!)

[21:12]Professor Gray --felt the pain lessen, although the 'shadows' were still--appearing to burrow into his chest. Still, the worst of it was stalled for the moment, and 1-Harm was *removed* from Rha! Good job!

[21:13]Professor Gray: "Eggh--okay. Okayokay slightly more comfortable--y'all. The statues. If you would."

[21:15]★Fiona Delaine: "It'll be okay, papa- I've got you!"

[21:15]P'tajha Kett mutters to herself, more than anyone else. "Nothin' that don't fall under my sight, world rests an' begins anew--implyin' th'turn o' th'sun?"

[21:15]Professor Gray: "And--gghn--"

[21:15]P'tajha Kett takes a couple steps into the room, thinking aloud? Probably not a good idea with Rha in a deathtrap, really.

[21:15]Professor Gray: "An' th'sun comes *first,* --someone. The statue, if y'would?"

[21:17]P'tajha Kett glances up, looks at the other three like they're probably more inclined to actually touch the statues, maybe.

[21:17]★Fiona Delaine squeaks in alarm and repeats the process. Shivering threads of silver and blue once again dance across Rha's form from Fi's grasp, bearing the sweet lyrics of ancient and alien song as they salve injuries and coax life back to his system.

[21:18]Svana Heart breaths out an indignant scoff of a laugh as she strolls on over towards the statue, "Talk to me here, Gray. What are we doing?"

[21:19]Professor Gray hissed, feeling the start of another bout of pain. "It's. Askin' us to engage the statues in the proper order, and figure out who's who, get it? The sun--is the first an' th'last, and everythin' that happens, is within it, an' through it. TH'priest, follows th'sun, an' the maiden--" another jolt of pain, another hiss, 2-Harm.

[21:19]Professor Gray yes. 2-Harm.

[21:21]Svana Heart waves before the stone-wrought inquisitor and blithely remarks, "You're Azeyma, right?" Flinching a bit as Rha is abruptly cut short she hesitates to reconsider, "...The hells? It's getting worse?"

[21:21]Professor Gray: "--Search for--search for a mechanism. or SOMETHIN'."

[21:22]Svana Heart reaches up and tries to yolk on the dagger.

[21:22]Professor Gray --one of the shadows disengage, and there is *palpable* relief from Rha. He still seems in pain, but the severity went back down. "Gods. Fuck--okay. Okay. Next."

[21:23]Svana Heart moves along to the statues across the door, set to begin again as she calls back into the crowd, "One of you grab the last loudmouth back there."

[21:23]★Ruran Vas nods and turns toward the statue in the back.

[21:24]Professor Gray: "WAIT--WAITWAIT--make sure. Y'get orders right--"

[21:24]Professor Gray: "WHO AM I!" cried B. "WHO ARE *YOU!*" Cried C.

[21:24]★Fiona Delaine attempts to HEAL AGAIN, as before.

[21:27]Professor Gray --as she tries to heal Rha again, the shadows lash out at *her* instead, dealing one harm--even as Rha recovers one!

[21:28]★Fiona Delaine: Though the soothing wounds save Rha's wounds, she's lashed by the shadows, lurching back with a gasp for it.

[21:27]Professor Gray --as she tries to heal Rha again, the shadows lash out at *her* instead, dealing one harm--even as Rha recovers one!

[21:28]★Fiona Delaine: Though the soothing wounds save Rha's wounds, she's lashed by the shadows, lurching back with a gasp for it.

[21:28]Professor Gray was HEALED--so he'll chime in! "We don't. Touch. The one back there."

[21:29]Professor Gray: "Because. It's not. TH'maiden. *We* are. "

[21:29]Professor Gray: "...I am."

[21:29]★Ruran Vas: "Ah..."

[21:29]★Fiona Delaine: "The manliest maiden I know," Fi weakly laughs.

[21:29]Professor Gray: "Progressive!"

[21:29]★Ruran Vas steps away.

[21:29]Svana Heart: "We're a bit short on maidens, sometimes you gotta make due."

[21:29]Professor Gray: "So--so I. Hhgh."

[21:29]You point at Svana Heart.

[21:29]Svana Heart throws her lever decisively, leaving Rha as the final stage of the riddle.

[21:30]You nod to Svana Heart.

[21:30]Professor Gray: "And it," he felt emboldened, as another thread fell off! "Ends, where it begins--with the settin' of the sun." A, again. The shadows dispersed.

[21:30]Professor Gray: "Gods DAMN. That smarts."

[21:30]★Fiona Delaine: "Phew.."

[21:31]P'tajha Kett makes a little annotation in her tome, then straps it back to her side.

[21:31]Professor Gray: "They said Lord Shoshotepo controlled shadows, but I ain't think--it was. ...Literal." He looked at the tears in his coat, the blood on his chest. "...Ominous."

[21:31]Ruran Vas expresses his worry with you.

[21:31]★Fiona Delaine: "Can I help?" Fi's bleeding herself, but she obviously want everyone at top!

[21:31]Professor Gray: "I was almost--that bitch." He thumbed to the mural, before setting the stones in place.

[21:31]Professor Gray: "--Someone patch Fi up. I'm. I'm fine. Just a scratch."

[21:31]★Fiona Delaine: "Okay.."

[21:31]Svana Heart: "All the timeless and auspicious power of a lantern with a shade."

[21:32]Svana Heart fishes about her materials with a rummage of displaced leather and clinking glass bottles before holding some vial up on offer to Fiona.

[21:32]★Fiona Delaine: "A-ah.. Merci." Fi reaches for the vial and GLUGS it.

[21:34]Professor Gray set the stones in their proper places, and the Mural pushed back, then slid to the right, disappearing into the wall to reveal a *vast* space behind it--with plenty of room. CONGRATS, YOU SOLVED THE FIRST PART OF THE QUEST. Time for a (hurried) part two, and onto the reward phase! Rha turned, smiling at them all--then scowling at Taj. "...I'm watching you," was all he said, before relenting to her presence.

[21:35]★Fiona Delaine scurries in after Rha, peering around.

[21:36]Professor Gray the room ahead was a larrge chamber, leading deeper in. *Treasures of all sorts filled it, gold, silver, gems, ornate furniture and lavish clothing, all perfectly preserved,*

and--dolls. Wel, golems, although much smaller, like sculptures on stone ball bearings. Lounging on golden chaise longues, propped against walls, 'reading' ancient tomes, all perfectly still--none of them cast shadows.

[21:38]★Ruran Vas peers around, skimming over the various treasures. The golems pique his interest more than anything else, but he seems content to simply observe from afar.

[21:39]★Fiona Delaine conjures a small orb of light and casts it about the chamber to lend us eyes. Except her dice are bad. Oh non.

[21:41]Professor Gray Ruran would see, even at a distance--the faces were much too detailed, despite no soulstone, they gave off immense amounts of aether. They were--people. Once. People with no shadows.

[21:41]Professor Gray turned to sculptures.

[21:41]Professor Gray AS FOR THE READ A BAD SITUATION ROLL

[21:43]★Ruran Vas 's brows furrow, and the soulstone around his own neck glimmers. "... He looks from one face to the next, a quiet, thoughtful hum barely escaping the confines of his mask.

[21:44]P'tajha Kett observes while the others investigate; she's curious, but there's already enough folks milling about to trigger any traps (and she's certain there are traps) that she's content to wait until they do.

[21:45]Professor Gray the lights cast by still-glowing lamps give off an uncomfortable aether--notably, everywhere the 'statues' are, the pale unnatural light is cast upon them. Unlike the previous dungeon, it may be best to *avoid* the light--which seems to have something to do with it.

[21:46]★Fiona Delaine: "... We want to avoid the light. The light banishes the shadows and petrifies them." Fi shivers. "... This hoard is mostly out of reach by that, I think."

[21:46]Professor Gray: "Alright, magical nerds," as if he wasn't one, "Whaddyall--"

[21:46]Professor Gray: "...Well. There y'go." He looked to Ruran. "--Pal. You've been silent this whole time. Y"alright...?"

[21:48]★Ruran Vas turns his attention to Rha. "Of course," he quietly replies. "I believe Fiona is correct, as...these seem to have been people once..." He makes a subtle gesture toward the nearest statue.

[21:49]Svana Heart gives a low whistle in thoughtful admiration, "Crazy dead bastard knew one trick but he knew it well. That's some creativity on what you can do with a shadow, huh."

[21:50]Professor Gray: "--Avoid the lights, then. I'd hate t'lose one of you--except. SVana!"

[21:50]Professor Gray: "Svana, I do think that ring over there is **perfect** for you!"

[21:50]Ruran Vas furrows his brow at you.

[21:50]★Fiona Delaine: "I.. Might be able to use aero to drag some small things our way?" Fi offers, helpfully.

[21:50]Professor Gray: ". . . I'm teasin' her. She'd be less talkative as a statue."

[21:50]★Fiona Delaine: "Oh.."

[21:51]Svana Heart: "Psh. Like I don't have a sultana's ransom in rings to sell already. Can you believe no one wants the damn thing? What's the point of priceless treasures if no one buys them.

[21:51]Professor Gray -- There was a loud THUD behind them, the sound of engines roaring in the distance. Rha quirked his brow but--opted to simply keep moving.

[21:51]Professor Gray: "Is it, unno, cursed?"

[21:52]★Fiona Delaine: "Eep.."

[21:52]Professor Gray looked at his shoulder at the party hanging back.

[21:52]Professor Gray: "HEY! HURRY IT UP!"

[21:53](Svana Heart) Svana moves along with the team but retrieves a large individually wrapped chunk of... something, from her medicine bag. Half of its contents, really. She abandons the parcel by one of the pillars....

[21:55]Professor Gray rounded the corner and--stopped, mouth agape in. Shock. Horror? Confusion? There were more of those statues, all stacked atop each-other, as though clambering on each-other as they all desperately reached for a corridor which was **raised** above, with no ladder, no stairwell. He looked to the left, the other direction. Nothing. He looked back to the pile of statues, all reaching for that lone passage.

[21:56]Professor Gray: "...Th'hells were **they** so desperate about--and there ain't no light here. They should be fine."

[21:56]★Fiona Delaine: ".. An escape? I don't like this." Fi peers at the statue-heap and the strangely arrayed corridor.

[21:57]★Ruran Vas studies the piles of statues for a long moment. Then he glances behind him, toward the distant noise.

[21:58]P'tajha Kett doesn't like -that- one bit, her gaze shifting from the pile of statues to Rha, though one of her ears is now permanently cocked in the direction they'd come from.

[21:58]Professor Gray clicked his tongue. "...Poor bastards." He approached, cautiously, wary of any changes in the ambient aether--and there was. A lot. A *lot* of it, ahead, something strange, something preternatural, it almost--called. it *begged,* it *implored* him that he reach out, that he come for it, that he--he took two steps back, and looked. "...No further," he announced. Emphatically. "Expedition's off."

[21:59]★Fiona Delaine: ".. Oh- oh. Right- right. Um. Of course!"

[21:59]★Fiona Delaine: "Okay! Let's! Let's go home."

[21:59]★Fiona Delaine wasn't gonna argue with Expedition Dad.

[21:59]★Ruran Vas: "Off..?"

[21:59]Professor Gray: "There's somethin' up there. It's--calling me."

[21:59]Professor Gray: "It called *them.* "

[22:00]★Fiona Delaine: ".. Oh. Oh. I don't like that."

[22:00]Svana Heart adjusts her spectacles with a pensive hum. "Something like that, huh. Well. Plenty of historic value right here where it sits."

[22:00]★Ruran Vas nods slowly.

[22:00]★Fiona Delaine reaches to take Rha's arm and .. usher him out of the corridor. She didn't like that At ALI.

[22:00]Svana Heart: "Maybe we'll take a slow run at this one, work out some kind of process?"

[22:00]Professor Gray shrugged her off gently, though he made no moves for the reward.

"I--yeah. Yeah, we should come back, I--"

[22:01]P'tajha Kett takes that information and, well, she's going to attempt to cast a cursory glance at the rest of the room. If that was the focal point--was it distracting from something else?

[22:01]Svana Heart catches Taj's inquiry past the corner of her eye, following her wayward gaze with similar scrutiny at the provocation.

[22:02]Professor Gray: ". . . I--"

[22:02]Professor Gray: "I'm okay, I'm okay--"

[22:02]★Fiona Delaine: "Non- non, you're obviously not!" Fi once again attempts to pull him out of the corridor.

[22:02]Professor Gray: "I'm just puzzlin' it out."

[22:03]★Fiona Delaine: "/Papa!/"

[22:03]★Ruran Vas: "Rha."

[22:03]Professor Gray shrugged her off again, but this time turned, smiled. Rha SURVIVED HIS ACT UNDER PRESSURE ROLL. "Relax-- both of you, *relax!* I'm just.Thinking."

[22:03]Professor Gray: "I ain't dumb enough to climb up there."

[22:03]★Fiona Delaine keeps her hands on Rha's arm, frowning.

[22:03]Svana Heart clears her throat, "Hey, old bastard. Not to join the chorus here they've got a point looking out for you, right?"

[22:04]Svana Heart: "I don't even want to look at that thing funny until we've got a fair chance at beating that curse."

[22:04]★Fiona Delaine: "You /taught/ me to follow my gut and when dealing with spooky magic and terrible curses- y-yeah."

[22:05]Professor Gray --They weren't alone. There was a crash, then a *roaring, deafening sound* behind them. And everyone. EVERYONE. Could hear that. Rha nodded, reluctantly, taking a step back--only to start, as he heard it, "What--what the *FUCK* was that, I--" ...and then the lights went off. All of them. Even the light pouring in from the chamber above. The aether went--dark. dead. or more like.

[22:05]Professor Gray ...dampened. *That* was the boon (albeit, with the danger.).

[22:06]★Fiona Delaine: "A-ah-?!"

[22:06]P'tajha Kett jumps, ears flat, eyes wide--trying to adjust to the sudden and relatively absolute darkness.

[22:06]Svana Heart: "...Did they find the leftover explosives?"

[22:06]Of the 68 parties currently recruiting, all match your search conditions.

[22:06]Professor Gray: "The leftover WHAT--?!"

[22:06]★Fiona Delaine had great night vision but that wasn't *darkness*. She eeps. And tries, desperately, to weave an orb of light to cast at least SOME light on their surroundings. "Explosives?!"

[22:07]Professor Gray --in the dark, the statues began to move. Clacking, cluttering, the mob of them collapsed, rose, and then started marching onto the party--while behind them, something --someone--else, drew closer. COMBAT TIME. BOSS FIGHT: THE MANY, MANY MANNEQUINS.

[22:07]Svana Heart: "Hey, HEY! No, not like that. Listen, I didn't just set a fuse or anything. These dumb bastards would have had to--... Oh -HELLS-."

[22:07]★Ruran Vas 's entire body freezes at the sudden sound. The words that follow do not help. "...". He lifts one trembling hand to his sword, the other to hold his head.

[22:07]★Fiona Delaine: "A-ah..?"

[22:08]You look at Ruran Vas in shock!

[22:08]★Fiona Delaine sloooooowly turns at the grinding, scraping of stone on stone, hopefully with light-orb in-hand.

[22:08]Svana Heart: "This is EXACTLY what that was there to seal in case EXACTLY THIS happened. Fuck!"

[22:08]★Fiona Delaine: ".. oh non.."

[22:09]Professor Gray approached Ruran, gripping him with both hands on each shoulder. "Ruran--Ruran. Look at me, look at me, huh--better yet. Look at the fuckin' *mannequins.* I get it. This is a lot. But you're--you're gonna be okay. Okay? Just. Just do what you do best. Focus on what needs t'be done. Focus on. The moment, not what's back there, what's. What's in front of you. We could *really* use your help right now. Don't--don't go off on me, y'hear? We can get drunk and. and have a *day* of it. Later."

[22:10]★Fiona Delaine: "A-ah- ah- um-"

[22:11]P'tajha Kett takes a deep breath, and lets it out slowly; her gaze shifts back over her shoulder to Rha and his peptalk, and to the masked knight himself. "...". Her gaze didn't linger long, however, considering the more -pressing- issue of imminent mannequins.

[22:11]Svana Heart appends a surly note, "Not to make a show of it but you're the only one here in armor with two working arms. If you want to keep up a habit of being in the right place at the right time, well, here's the next one!"

[22:13]★Ruran Vas nods quickly, trying to shake the feeling that was clenching his gut and making his vision blur. "Y-yes," he stammers, pulling his sword free. He couldn't say much more than that, instead meeting Rha's gaze and nodding more. He would do his best!

[22:14]Svana Heart wastes no more time to talk, slinging the barrel of her overscaled weapon across a shoulder and fishing out an ether so potent it nearly glows in the dark, downing the bulk of it before spilling the rest across the weapons cylinder as she brings it back to level.

[22:28]P'tajha Kett || The problem with casting arcanist spells in the dark is not really being able to be -precise- with ones markings.

22:34]Professor Gray --as Taj's shadowflare was placed amidst the mannequins, they--all immediately ceased to function. Being cut off from light-sources was enough, but the dark seemed to cling to them, as though they were desperate to regain what they'd lost. The magical blackness swirled and formed--human shapes, unbidden by Taj, reaching, climbing, attaching to the mannequins who--began to stand at attention, staring at her. Not all of them. But a solid--half. The remainder approach, rushing at her and>

[22:35]Professor Gray assaulting her for 1 harm. they're not very strong.

[22:38]P'tajha Kett staggered backwards at the surge of mannequins (and honestly, was a vaguely unsettled by the ones standing at attention), and she--looks taken briefly aback as Rha tackles right into them. "-Even-," she says, scoffing, but she doesn't ...refute it.

[22:41]Svana Heart does the best she can bracing her revolver across a slingbound arm, not even bothering to aim as she fires into the mob from the hip just as soon as the professor dives out of the line of fire. The weapon's barrel glows an ominous warm amber, whatever ether spilt across its surface catching alight like oil before a flame and shattering off in a hail of earth-born crystals when she lets loose the projectile full-charged, a whole pillar of a stalagmite rips through the air like a bullet!

[22:42]Svana Heart reels from the recoil of the overcharged assault, smacked across the chest by her rebounding revolver amidst a hail of unbidden shockwaves. It's a prototype, what can you do.

[22:42]Professor Gray Several more mannequins are scattered apart. MOst of them, even! YOWZA! Poor Svana takes 1-harm from her own fucking gun. nice.

[22:47]Professor Gray --the shadows, again, tether to mannequins. And they stand at attention towards Fiona, much like they stood in attention towards Taj.

[22:47]★Fiona Delaine: Fi draws her hands upward. Threads of sable, threads of night pour from her hands, melding with blood erupting from her palms, until she jerks and contorts in place and spews forth a terrible pillar of nightmarish, vaporous darkness that resounds about the mannequins with a hideous, alien roar.

[22:49]P'tajha Kett glances aside at Fiona, her expression, even in shadow, awash with /what the fuck/.

[22:56]Professor Gray --the mannequins swipe back, clanging mostly uselessly against th eman, but they get a few strikes to soft areas, to the wrists, to the neck, and certainly batter the armor enough for bruising (-1 Harm). Bu thten--he defeats! the last of the mannquins! Except the ones...standing weirdly at attention.

[22:57]Professor Gray moved towards where the mannequins were. ". . . I get it. Controllin' shadows. I get it. This entire place is--under the influence of the artifact."

[22:58]Professor Gray snapped their fingers at Taj, "Taj--see if you can. make them do things. send them up that chamber for the relic. Iunno if that'll work." And--snapped at Fiona. "...Try and make them take care of our guests. I have a feeling I know who that is."

[22:58]Professor Gray: "--The noises, behind us."

[22:58]★Fiona Delaine: ".. and shadows can control *them*," Fi murmurs, staring at the mannequins. Tentatively, she raises a hand, trying to pull the shadows and guide them toward the corridor behind them.

[22:59]★Ruran Vas lowers and sheathes his blade with a shuddering breath and retreats back to the group.

[22:59]P'tajha Kett frowns at the mannequins; but she watches Fiona from her periphery to see if her experiment bears fruit.

[23:00]Svana Heart nods along in quick assent, "Yeah, yeah, alright true probably right. Quick question though."

[23:00]Professor Gray the mannequins--once people. disturbing--oblige, marching down the corridor after the shadows. once ordered, they seemed to keep. going. ...and going.and going.and going.

[23:00]Svana Heart: "What the fuck was that?"

[23:01]★Fiona Delaine peeks around the corner to try and continue guiding them. And to see what's coming from behind.

[23:01]P'tajha Kett: "Hm."

[23:02]Professor Gray it's hard to see, the lights are *out.* they vanish-- ...and horrified. agonized screams of the men who were giving pursuit--likely Nonoimo's men--could be heard. Then. Uncomfortable silence.

[23:02]Professor Gray: "...Haha."

[23:02]Professor Gray: ".....Hah."

[23:02]★Fiona Delaine nervously laughs.

[23:02]Professor Gray: ".....Wow I'm glad that wasn't us???"

[23:02]★Fiona Delaine: ".. W-well," Fi says.

[23:02]★Fiona Delaine: ".. Y-yyyyeah." She tries not to think about how she just killed who knows how many people!

[23:02]Svana Heart: "...There were a lot more of those behind us, too."

[23:02]Professor Gray: ". . . Maybe let's not do that again, but also--"

[23:02]★Ruran Vas: "..."

[23:03]Professor Gray: "I--"

[23:03]Professor Gray: "...That was Nonoimo's men, right? Had to be."

[23:03]Professor Gray repeated, for reassurance,

[23:03]Professor Gray: "...Had t'be."

[23:03]Professor Gray It Was.

[23:03]Svana Heart: "Who else?"

[23:04]Professor Gray whistled.

[23:04]★Fiona Delaine: "Um. Papa, I think I should very much like to go home now."

[23:04]Professor Gray: "...Retreat and reconvene for the--"

[23:04]Svana Heart: "Which makes this a heist. Now, suggestions on how to get this thing out of here?"

[23:04]★Ruran Vas cants his head at 'heist'.

[23:04]Professor Gray held up their hands. "We makin' off with the goods, leavin' an' never comin' back, or just. Leavin'." The DM should mention the fight is over.

[23:04]★Fiona Delaine :grimacing: emoji.

[23:04]★Fiona Delaine: ".. I. I. I guess. Since we're here. We might as well and get the thing and. Go."

[23:05]★Fiona Delaine shudders.

[23:05]Professor Gray: "--Nonoimo Totoimo is a criminal lynchpin, after this treasure because *I don't know why,* "he briefly explained.

[23:05]Svana Heart: "Given the alternative is leaving this very cursed deadly whatever unholy thing it is to a dubious quasi-legal enterprise...."

[23:05]★Ruran Vas: "I see..."

[23:05]Professor Gray: "Runs a smugglin' and weapons production umbrella known as Nonoimo & Sons."

[23:05]Svana Heart: "Heisting is the ethical alternative."

[23:05]P'tajha Kett exhales, and she's going to set about trying to get the mannequins paying attention to her commands to--move. She hasn't control over shadows like that, but she's--making do, best she can with little threads of shadow to try and make them--climb, again. A ladder, up, where Rha indicated, not that she can see -exactly- where it's going.

[23:06]Professor Gray: "This aint' even heistin'. It's. An artifact, owned by a dead guy. This is."

[23:06]Of the 60 parties currently recruiting, all match your search conditions.

[23:06]Professor Gray: "Retrieval. Only a heist if we have to take it from *them.* Let's avoid that."

[23:06]P'tajha Kett: "Grave robbin'?"

[23:06]P'tajha Kett says helpfully.

[23:06]You look at P'tajha Kett in shock!

[23:06]Professor Gray: "Wh--"

[23:06]Ruran Vas furrows his brow at P'tajha Kett.

[23:06]★Ruran Vas: "..."

[23:07]Professor Gray: " *For academic merit.* I don't just take from the dead senselessly, ain't compare me to no common adventurer or crook!"

[23:07]P'tajha Kett: "Mmhm."

[23:07]P'tajha Kett: "Salve yer conscience however y'like, Professor."

[23:07]★Ruran Vas rubs the side of his neck.

[23:08]Professor Gray: "... *Most* archaeology is takin' from the dead," he retorts, "Even plates. Even bones. *especially* bones. FUck off with your bullshit. A slong as y' make *minimal impact.* An' that's what--that's what we do. Minimal impact. Take only what you're after, leave the site in as good condition as possible. What. Y'think the viceregents and emperors mummified in museums just. *Appeared* there? Overnight?"

[23:08]Professor Gray was RILED UP BY THAT. DON'T. COMPARE HIM. TO THOSE SCUMM!!
LIKE YOU, TAJ.

[23:09]★Ruran Vas: "We ought to hurry." Ruran tries to gently nudge the task at hand, away from the controversy.

[23:10]★Fiona Delaine hugs Rha's arm, trying not to think of the horrible army of the dead she just unleashed.

[23:10]P'tajha Kett: "Do I look like I've qualms with this? Sides, 'minimal impact'?" She gestures behind her, as though to point out -that- hypocrisy, but she. Clears her throat.

[23:10]P'tajha Kett: "Aye, anyroad."

[23:10]Svana Heart: "...It's an odd sort of sun where he's taking the words out of my mouth."

[23:11]Professor Gray -- OH! THE STATUES ARE CLIMBING. They seem *primed,* as if they still desperately want whatever was up there. They disappear for the moment-- ...before returning. One of them wearing a simple ring, with-- ...a simple ring, made of bone, with a stone unlike any other had been seen before. It shimmered like the sun, but as it rotated, veins of dark were able to be seen running through it-- *moving* through it, in soft, elegant swirls. It exhibited a strong pull, to everyone in the room.

[23:11]Professor Gray put it on. put it on. put it on--the call Rha already resisted.

[23:11]Professor Gray: "And there it is."

[23:11]P'tajha Kett: "Oh."

[23:11]Professor Gray: "...really? A fucking *ring?*" "

[23:11]★Ruran Vas tilts his head at Svana's comment, and his shoulders drop with a sigh for solidarity.

[23:12]★Fiona Delaine: "Oh- I- oh-"

[23:13]★Fiona Delaine: ".. Gosh," Fi whispers, her will iron. "Let's. Put that in a lead-lined box. I brought one like you asked, papa!"

[23:14]Professor Gray: "Yeah--thanks, darlin'--"

[23:14]Professor Gray: "Hey--hey, Taj--call it off."

[23:14]Professor Gray: " *CALL IT OFF.* "

[23:14]★Fiona Delaine: "Um-"

[23:15]Svana Heart stares blindly into the ring, that faint glimmer of purpose and power within the darkest reaches of the tomb. It becomes - for an instant - her whole world... though she restrains herself with wonder and marvel to avoid pressing into danger. Nevertheless, it leaves her far too preoccupied to intervene....

[23:14]>> P'tajha Kett: It calls to you. It *promises* things to you. Riches, power--safety? Security? power over life and death? Control? Anything she wanted, shadow magic could do *many* things. *Impossible* things. She only need to put it on. put me on. *put me on. Put. me. on.*

[23:14]Professor Gray: "Yeah--thanks, darlin'--"

[23:14]Professor Gray: "Hey--hey, Taj--call it off."

[23:14]Professor Gray: " *CALL IT OFF.* "

[23:14]★Fiona Delaine: "Um-"

[23:15]Svana Heart stares blindly into the ring, that faint glimmer of purpose and power within the darkest reaches of the tomb. It becomes - for an instant - her whole world... though she restrains herself with wonder and marvel to avoid pressing into danger. Nevertheless, it leaves her far too preoccupied to intervene....

[23:15]P'tajha Kett doesn't, she doesn't call it off at all. In fact, she's straight up reaching for that ring with a single-minded desire.

[23:15]Professor Gray --and Taj takes the ring. because she failed the roll. AND--

[23:16]★Ruran Vas narrows his eyes at the ring, aware of its attempt to pull but...not much more than that. "... He peeks up toward Taj.

[23:17]Professor Gray: "--Take her fuckin' arms. Rip it off her. C'mon. Ain't gonna sit around for this."

[23:18]★Fiona Delaine: "Ah-!" Fi dives forward, attempting to SCHLAP it outta Taj's arms, but she's slow to react mostly because of the surprise of all that's going on.

23:18]P'tajha Kett admires it, briefly, turns it in her hand, and--slips it on her finger. It's snug over the glove, for now, but it fits. Too well, maybe. And then she's grinning at Rha and she's--there's shadows, bubbling up around her feet and then suck her down, leaving -nothing- behind.

[23:18]Professor Gray said, plainly,

[23:18]Professor Gray: "I mean. At least she didn't try to kill us?"

[23:18]★Ruran Vas is added to the rush of people charging Taj--but he too is too late.

[23:19]★Fiona Delaine: ".. oh. Biscuits."

[23:19]Professor Gray: ". . ." He rubbed at his face. "...This is why I do what I do."

[23:19]★Fiona Delaine: ".. I shoulda blown her up when I got here," Fi whinges.

[23:19]Professor Gray: "Reconvene. Rediscuss--"

[23:20]★Ruran Vas 's soulstone flickers brightly as he looks around.

[23:20]Professor Gray: "Someone get Jia. He's fiercely attached to her."

[23:20]Professor Gray: "Fi, I'll--leave it to you." They extended their arm out.

[23:20]★Fiona Delaine takes the offered hand and wobbles to standing, miserably.

[23:20]Professor Gray: "I knew she was dangerous, but--"

[23:20]★Fiona Delaine: "Why is it that everyone attached to Jia is someone I want to like, drop dead of a random stroke or something," Fi mutters.

[23:21]★Ruran Vas: "... The consequences of this venture are starting to sink into the knight.

[23:22]Professor Gray: "Can't pin that bitch down. Threatens me into bringin' her. Then *saves* me, when shit goes sour. Then shows up, askijn' me for. *Advice.* Then--barges her way in here, again, like everything's fine. And then this. What is fucking WITH her, I--I--"

[23:22]Professor Gray: "Emergency meetin' at the museum, within the sennight."

[23:22]Professor Gray: "This is bad."

[23:22]Professor Gray: "Real bad."

[23:22]Professor Gray: "Shoshotepe weren't--wiped from history for no reason."

[23:22]Professor Gray: "Shoshotepe weren't--wiped from history for no reason."

[23:22]★Fiona Delaine: ".. Right! Yes!"

[23:22]★Ruran Vas nods slowly; that was exactly his thought.

[23:22]★Fiona Delaine :grimacing:

[23:23]★Fiona Delaine just inwardly imagines roasting K'velhka and now P'tajha on a pyre.

[23:23]Professor Gray: "...But she didn't obliterate us on the spot, yeah?" He looked over his shoulder, right now, playing the reasonable man. The *thoughtful* man. "She could have stolen our shadows, or somethin'. Coulda. Turned us t'stone. Coulda driven a dagger of it into our hearts. And she didn't."

[23:24]Professor Gray: "I *felt* the pull to do. Awful things. The moment I approached. An' she didn't, right? That should--that should say somethin'."

[23:24]★Ruran Vas: "I doubt it was out of mercy."

[23:24]★Fiona Delaine lets out a miserable reptilian grumble.

[23:24]Professor Gray: "...Iunno. I suppose it--ain't matter,"

[23:24]Professor Gray chewed his lip, fretfully, angrily. "FUckin' miserable excuse of a--we leave. We reconvene. We plan. We know where she operates. An' we have people who know her. We can solve this."

[23:25]Svana Heart begins spinning about her pistol in a fanciful manner as she offhandedly suggests, "I don't care for repeat performances but I suppose we dug up the trouble. It was burried down here once before already, shouldn't be too hard." An attempt to pass the spinning weapon to her other arm quickly reveals that, yes, it's still broken and in a sling. She nonchalantly retrieves and holsters the weapon.

[23:26]Professor Gray: "Tentative plans, I--Ruran. Help me research the supposed tale of this man, if ydon't mind. Svana. Find out *anything* y'can on activity, anything strange, reports of. Whatever. Shadow shit. Fi--get Jia. Understood?"

[23:26]★Fiona Delaine: "Okay.."

[23:27]Svana Heart: "Mercy, pride, apathy. Anyroads she takes, we've got more leverage now than with the whole Nonoimo conglomerate."

[23:27]Svana Heart: "Could be worse."

[23:27]You seem lost in thought.

[23:27]Svana Heart: "Could be worse."

[23:27]You seem lost in thought.

[23:27]Professor Gray WHISPERED.

[23:27]>> Svana Heart: "Let Nonoimo know who killed his men. Say it was her."

[23:27]★Ruran Vas studies Rha for a moment, then nods. "Certainly," he murmurs. He blinks as they whisper right in front of his face.

[23:27]Svana Heart responds with nothing more than a devilish grin.

[23:28]Professor Gray waved a hand, "Separate plans, Ruran."

[23:28]Professor Gray: "Y'really wanna know?"

[23:28]Professor Gray: "I don't mind."

[23:28]Svana Heart chimes in a hint of her own, "Conflict resolution."

[23:28]★Ruran Vas: "I...did not express interest."

[23:28]Professor Gray: "Fair."

[23:29]Svana Heart: "Although you should have, it'll be brilliant."

[23:29]Professor Gray: "If nothin' else, Svana, it'll slow her down. WHICH is what I want. Not dead. Slowed."

[23:29]Professor Gray said that part *aloud,* give an idea on the topic.

[23:30]Professor Gray: "More--I don't know who could still be listenin'."

[23:31]Professor Gray: "...ON that note. M'goin' home."

[23:31]★Ruran Vas: "Of course, that is wise. We are...still here, after all." He gestures to the general room.

[23:32]Professor Gray sighed. He seemed--tired, for a moment. But then--the crook of a smile. Weary, but a smile nonetheless. "Svana. Just like old times, huh? Time for some good o' fashioned hero work. Not that anyone ever described me in such terms."

[23:33]Svana Heart wavers about at her words, rolling her spare hand at the wrist, "Ehhh, close enough. Who's splitting hairs over it?"

[23:33]★Fiona Delaine scurries to follow, offering Ruran and Svana both worried smiles.

[23:34]Professor Gray: "Siri'd write about this. Maybe I should. Lominsa Dan an' the...."

[23:34]Professor Gray: "...And the Shadow Beneath Qarn."

[23:34]Svana Heart loses focus to a worrisome recollection, "...better get those explosives before anyone actually stumbles into them, though."

[23:34]Professor Gray started making his EXIT!

[23:34]★Ruran Vas || A flicker of concern can be seen behind his mask as he meets Fiona's gaze, before following after Rha.