

Intermission Three – Mystify

When Kevin had asked Elizabeth if she knew anything about Merlin, he'd found her amazingly reluctant to believe in the existence of the wizard, despite her having spent time with a witch named Morgana Le Fey. Over the course of breakfast – a lovely eggs Benedict – he'd eventually gotten her to come around and accept that if Morgana was real, it made sense that Merlin was real as well.

Geoffrey's Gambit was, in fact, a legitimate bar that had existed up in the hills for over half a century, making it one of the older establishments around Los Angeles, and the owner's name was Seamus Madigan the 3rd, his grandfather, first of his name, having been the one to build the place after emigrating from Ireland some thirty years before the bar's founding.

Digging around on the Internet found that there weren't *any* crime reports for Geoffrey's Gambit, or any news stories at all, really. The place had never been robbed, never been damaged by an earthquake, never set on fire, not even so much as had a window broken in, as far as Kev could tell. That alone was enough to convince Kev that Merlin had done something to establish a kind of protective field around the place, especially with the window work he'd seen there.

The second most surprising thing that came out over breakfast was that Elizabeth didn't, in fact, have any way to get in contact with Morgana Le Fey. The entire gift had been set up to operate independently of her, post launch, and was self-sustaining. If something went wrong, Elizabeth had been told Morgana would swing by eventually and clean it up, but she couldn't think of any possible wrinkle in her plans that would need for Elizabeth to get a hold over her.

Morgana clearly hadn't expected her handiwork to attract the attention of Merlin.

The rest of their time over breakfast had been spent reading up a little on Morgana Le Fey, but the intense amount of conflicting information made all of their heads hurt. In some stories, she was in love with Lancelot. In others, she was a lover of either Arthur or Merlin, sometimes both. In the earliest stories, she was a mostly benevolent enchantress who sought to help Arthur, but in later works she was, in fact, Arthur's greatest adversary.

By the time they'd finished breakfast, Kev had decided to consider anything written about Morgana or Merlin to just be hearsay, and that it would be impractical to believe any one story over another. He would need to make up his own mind regarding these things, and so far, neither Morgana nor Merlin had seemed to inflict anything but kindness upon him, although Merlin's conversation had been tinged with the slightest amount of mischief, something Kev just *knew* was going to come back and bite him in the ass at some point.

While neither Ashley nor Natalie seemed to put much stock in the conversation, Elizabeth's insistence that Morgana Le Fey was real seemed to give the two other women at least a little pause, as if they were considering what that might mean, not just for them but for the world overall.

If magic was real, what else had it done in the world?

After breakfast, Kev needed to head down into Hollywood proper to meet up with Alice, so Ashley and Natalie hopped into his Tesla Model X, so that he could give them a ride down to where they needed to be – Ashley to do more prep work on campus, Natalie to teach some aerobics classes – while Elizabeth remained at the house to continue scheduling appointments for additional people to bring into his household. The next interview he had was scheduled for tomorrow, a candidate for his bodyguard and driver position, something he still felt was ridiculous, but that Elizabeth was adamant he get as soon as possible. Both Ashley and Natalie said they would take Ubers back to the house so that Kev wasn't tied to their schedules, but he insisted he would check in with each of them before he headed home, so that if their timing lined up, he could just pick them up instead.

It was a bunch of excess driving, but his appointment with Alice had been scheduled for early afternoon, as apparently their reshoots were being done at night, so she wouldn't be up early, although

they holding their reshooting schedule today to start even later than normal, so that Kev would have time to go over the rough cut with Alice.

Studio security wasn't too strict, something he found incredulous, but then he looked at his badge and realized it not only said VIP on it, it also said CREW on it. That word hit him like a ton of bricks. He wasn't being heavily scrutinized because he belonged here, because he worked here. A page offered to show him around, but Kev just asked where his meeting was and thanked him for his time.

Half way across the studio lot, he had his first real surprise. A warm voice from off to his side said, "Hey! Aren't you Kev Bishop? I loved Truth Knife! Can I get a picture with you?" He turned to look, a smile already on his face, although that got nervous very quickly as he looked at the man running up towards him, recognizing the guy as one of his favorite directors, Robert Rodriguez. He barely had time to smile before Robert had snapped a selfie with Kev on his phone, shaking his hand afterwards. "Thanks man, I'm a big fan. Was super bummed out to heard you guys broke up. Saw you at the Viper Room last year and you destroyed that room, amigo. What are you up to now?"

"I, uh, thanks! Thanks for being a fan. I'm actually a huge fan of *your* work too, Mr. Rodriguez," Kev said, a nervous laugh escaping him as he just began talking. "You're such a great master at weaving music into your work, from 'El Mariachi' all the way up to 'Sin City,' you're just killing it. Anyway, I, uh, well, I sort of work here? I'm on contract, anyway, for Emily Rouchard's new movie that Alice Karteaux is doing. I'm going to score it for them, or so they tell me."

"That's great!" he said, shaking my hand. "What's your next project after that?"

"I, uh, you know I'm not entirely sure I have one?" Kev laughed. "I'm pretty new to all of this, I'm afraid."

The director reached into one of the pockets of his long jacket and fished out a business card. "Then I want you to have your assistant reach out to mine and set up a meeting for us, so I can set up a project for us to work on together, because you have a gift for sound, my friend, and with Rouchard being your first, I'm gonna be your second, comprende?" He laughed, giving Kev a pat on the back. "Maybe we can talk about this 'Escape From New York' remake we're in meetings about. Normally I prefer to do everything in Texas, but I'm here showing rough cuts of 'Alita' to James Cameron and the rest of the studio, plus I've got some meetings with Disney I've got to do while I'm here, but we should definitely do lunch before I head back to Texas next week. Make it happen! Set the meeting and I'll make the time! Great running into you!"

And with that, one of his favorite directors of all time walked away from him, a giant smile on his face, and a promise of scoring work for Kevin still lingering in Kev's headspace. Kev was half-Mexican and half-Caucasian, so he'd grown up watching Rodriguez's career with delight, glad to see people who reminded him of his mother on the screen. There were plenty of successful Latino musicians (if he ran into Dave Navarro on the studio lot, Kev knew he would 100% *lose his shit*), but there were nowhere near as many Latinos working in the movies. He tucked the business card in his pocket and headed on across the campus.

He was still a few minutes walk from building they were meeting in when his phone rang. He fished it out from his pocket and saw Elizabeth's orgasm face on the iPhone peering back at him, which made him grin but also answer the call as quickly as possible.

"Hey Elizabeth, what's up?"

"You *met* Robert Rodriguez?" she asked him, incredulously.

"Wait, how the *hell* did you know about that?" he asked her. "That happened, like, five minutes ago. I was going to tell you when I got back to the house."

"He posted the picture to his Instagram and suddenly you're blowing up all over the place. I have a Google Alert set up for you, and I got, like, twenty hits within the course of a few minutes. Did you know he was a fan?"

"Absolutely did not," Kev laughed. "Apparently he saw us in our *one* performance at the Viper Room, and when he saw me walking across the studio campus, decided he wanted to say hi and ask if

I'd score something for him. I'm a huge fan of his, though. I have his business card and everything, so I guess he wants you to set up a lunch meeting between me and him, so we can talk about it?"

"Look at you, networking like a pro! Did he say what the project was?"

"He was talking about his 'Escape From New York' remake."

She clicked her tongue a little. "Hmm. That hasn't even got a projected shooting start date yet, but okay. If he wants to lunch and you want to lunch, it's my job to make sure you have that lunch, even if nothing comes of it. Take a picture of the business card with your phone and send it to me so I can reach out to his assistant and get the schedule matching started."

"Got it. I'll do that as soon as I hang up."

"Good! Now go and be wonderful in your meeting!"

As soon as he'd hung up the line, he took a picture of the business card and texted the image to Elizabeth, so she could start the process. By the time he'd reached the building for the screening, a message had popped up on his phone saying that he and Robert Rodriguez would be having lunch in two days time, at a Trejo's Tacos, and that Danny Trejo himself might even be stopping by for a little bit, something that made Kev grin even more than he was already.

Standing outside the building, he found Alice Karteaux vaping, taking in a long drag from the little e-cig before blowing it out into a quickly dissipating cloud that smelled like a donut. "So I hear you're making friends," she said to him with a smile. "Rob's a great guy. I hope you two can work your schedules out."

"I didn't think you two had ever worked together," Kev said, as Alice tucked the e-cig back into her pocket, leading him into the building.

"Came close a couple of times. I was in talks to play the role in 'Sin City' that Jessica Alba played, but I wanted more money to get my tits out than the studio wanted to pay, and they decided Jessica didn't have to do it," she said with a shrug. "Different worlds, different times, different places. It also means I didn't have to deal with that scumfuck Weinstein for very long, and thank Christ for that. Dodged a giant fucking bullet there."

"So I hear."

"I haven't had lunch yet, so I'm gonna have a buffalo burger with fries sent in while we're watching, since I can have them stop and restart the film any time we want. You want anything?"

"Sure, I'll have what you're having, although no ketchup on mine," he said, the two of them walking past a security guard like he wasn't even there, heading into an empty 50 seat theater the studio used for test screening and for reviewing dailies.

A young woman in her early 20s, a typical southern California blonde bombshell in business attire, scurried over to them, as Alice chuckled at Kev's statemet. "No self-respecting individual puts ketchup on a burger, and anyone who disagrees can fight me over it. Rose, I need you to get two bison burgers with Swiss cheese and bacon from DeConnick's, and two orders of cajun fries. We're not in any hurry, but make sure you grab the heat bag to keep them warm in case you get stuck in traffic."

"Yes ma'am, I'll hurry as much as I can," the young lady said meekly.

"Rose!"

"Yes ma'am?"

Alice smiled at her warmly. "*Relax*. I hired you to be my personal assistant, but that doesn't mean I want you to be a mindless zombie, okay? I'm not going to fly off the handle at you if it takes longer than expected and I'm not going to blow up in your face, alright? Whatever you've heard, I'm just a normal person, same as you. So stop walking around like I'm a time bomb waiting to go off. And grab yourself some food while you're at it, on me. Not going to have you starving yourself on my behalf, goddamn it."

The young woman smiled a little and visibly relaxed some before nodding. "Yes ma'am. Sorry about that, ma'am. I'll be back as soon as I safely can."

"There you go." Alice turned her attention back to Kev, leading them up to a pair of seats about

half way up and about half way between the two sides, dead smack in the middle of the theater. “Sorry about that. Breaking in a new assistant. Had to fire the old one for leaking details about my split from my ex. Fucking nightmare. Anyway, on to bigger and better things. I'm surprised you didn't bring your guitar or a keyboard or something for this.”

Kev shook his head. “On this pass, I'm just going to be taking notes in my little moleskin notebook, writing down scenes and ideas on what I think we should do soundwise for the scene. I'm also going to be scribbling down notes about your existing sound design, trying to make sure whatever music I put down behind it doesn't blend into your FX. Let's just get to it.”

For the next hour or so, Kev watched the first half of the roughest cut of “The Desperate Disintegration” with its leading lady by his side, as he took copious amounts of notes, doing his best to write without looking down the paper while he did. He'd gotten pretty good at that over the years, and he knew that while nobody else might be able to decipher his chicken scratch later, he would at least be able to determine what he'd been trying to get across.

They stopped around the halfway point as Alice's assistant Rose had returned with their food, as well as cold bottled water for both of them. Rose was about to leave, when Alice gestured that she should sit and enjoy her food with the two of them, which the woman did without saying a word.

“So what do you think so far, Kev?” Alice said to him. “I know you haven't read the book because it's not out yet, but just generally what are you thinking?”

Kev shrugged a little. “It's good.”

“No. Stop. Fuck that,” Alice said, gesturing angrily at him with a water bottle. “We're doing reshoots right now, so if you think something's wrong, there's still time for me to make it better, and I'm not asking you to be some fucking Hollywood yes man. I want your honest goddamn opinion about this motherfucker, because I want it to really *work*. I've got a lot of my own money invested in it, so spill the beans, you son of a bitch.”

He grinned a little, nodding. “I can't believe I have to tell *you* this, Alice, but you *need* some kind of action scene in the first thirty minutes. Not like, 'it would be good to have,' but '*need need triple underlined need!*' if you know what I mean. It doesn't have to be a long one, it doesn't have to be some elaborate shoot out or wire-fu melee fight, but you need *something* to give that first section some more gas in it, because as good as it is, it kinda drags a bit. It's starting to pick up now, but we're an *hour* into a film starring one of the most popular action stars in decades, and the first hour is just too *slow*.”

Alice suddenly pumped her fist up into the air triumphantly, glancing back over her shoulder to the back of the theater. “I fucking told you, Em! I fucking told you we weren't opening hot enough, and that chase scene we're shooting tomorrow is gonna give it some much needed pop!”

Kevin looked back and saw that at some point during the hour they'd been watching, Emily Rouchard had creeped in from a door in the back of the theater, and he'd been talking about the film right in front of her.

“It doesn't hurt to get additional opinions,” Emily said with a laugh, moving to walk down and get closer to them, as Kev and Alice dug into their burgers a bit. “What else do you think, Kev?”

He waited until he had finished what was in his mouth, took a swig from the water, and then spoke. “I think you're definitely right about wanting to go the retro synthwave approach for the score, particularly with how you've gone in the way of set design, with that aesthetic in how you built everything, even with the handful of effects that look ultra modern. Roland keyboards, old school 808 drum kits, maybe a couple of Korgs... yeah, I'll need to acquire a couple more pieces of vintage gear, but I'm certain I can get you the sound you're looking for.”

“Good,” Emily said. “That's what I want to hear. Reshoots are going to go another two weeks, including a chase scene near the beginning when Alice catches that droid peeping on her in the shower. Instead of it just disappearing, we're going to have her give it a bit of a follow before it loses her. That'll inject some speed into the front half. The back half might even have too *much* action, but you can tell us after you're done watching that.”

"I love the cinematography so far," Kev said, "even with so many effects in previs. Who's your DP?"

"Roger Deakins," Emily said. "My first time working with him, but he's great."

Kevin nodded. "One of the fucking best. I was so glad to see him finally get the Oscar for 'Blade Runner 2049.' He's had it coming for so damn long, all the way back to 'Barton Fink.' You couldn't be in better hands."

"And you're not bothered by all the placeholder pre-viz stuff jammed in there? I know it feels super weird, seeing everything with green screen backdrops all over the place or that weird placeholder CGI, but this is how making science-fiction films works these days," Alice sighed.

"We tried to do as much of the set work as we could practically, but there's only so much you can get away with, so a lot of it's getting built in post," Emily said.

"As long as you've got it looking right in the final cut, nobody should give a shit how the pre-viz stuff melds or doesn't meld," Kevin said with a laugh. "In terms of main theme, I was starting to think of something like... Bahm bum! Bahm bum! Ratatat ratatat ratatat badda dat badda dat dee deet deet deet deet BAH DAH A little bit of that sort of Miami Vice kinda feel, maybe."

"I fucking love it!" Alice cackled. "I can't wait to hear it with actual instruments."

The four of them continued chatting while the three of them finished their lunches, Kevin adding additional notes to his notebook as they talked. After that, they started up the movie, and true to her word, the second half was much more action packed with the first, including not one or two but three third act twists, designed to keep the audience guessing down to the very final frame of the movie. They hadn't added their credits sequence yet so after the last shot of the movie, the lights just came back up again.

"Better?"

"Much *much* better," he agreed. "And I think if you give the first half just even a handful of minutes of action, it'll flow that much better. What else are you doing in reshoots?"

The conversation continued for another hour or so until another woman, an African-American with cutting edge fashion sense, poked her head in and said, "They're just about ready for you on set, Ms. Rouchard, and I know wardrobe and makeup were hoping Alice would be there about ten minutes ago, so should I tell them you're both on your way or that it'll be a little bit longer?"

"Don't let me keep you," Kev said. "I've got more than enough to start working up some roughs and get some things sketched out in terms of getting themes and base tone feels, plus plenty of notes on gear I'm either going to have to dig out of storage, or acquire."

"Anything you need in terms of equipment," Alice said to him, "you bill that to us, and you keep the gear after you're done with it. My way of saying thank you for stepping in this late into the game when our other composer fell apart."

"Oh you had somebody else before me?" Kev chuckled. "Hopefully I'm not stepping on anyone's toes by coming in and taking over."

"I don't think so," Emily said to him. "We had Hans Zimmer scoring it, but after hearing his first piece of test music for it, the tone was just such a bad fit for the project that we both agreed to part ways. I think he didn't like us saying 'less doom, more neon' over and over again."

"OOOF!" Kev said. "Yeah, I can't imagine your film and his music was a very good culture fit."

"I certainly didn't think so," Emily said, "but one of the concessions I made to the studio in order to help get funding was to let them pick the first composer for the project until I could prove it wasn't a good mesh."

"The execs saw the gunfight scene at the beginning of the second half with Hans' first pass score on it, and they were aghast at how much it simply didn't work with his music. They couldn't wait to get someone else on the soundtrack, but Emily gets the second pitch, so once we have some of your music temped in, I think the execs won't have a problem with it," Alice said.

"Then I'll do my best not to let anyone down."

“Good luck, we're all counting on you,” Alice said, doing her best Leslie Nielsen impression from 'Airplane.'

It was early evening in LA, and that meant rush hour traffic no matter how he went about it, so Kev decided to wait it out a bit, and headed over to Caveman Vintage Music, a place where he was certain he could pick up all the gear that he needed.

Trey, the guy behind the counter, was an old friend of Kev's, and the moment he stepped into the store, it was a little like Norm walking into Cheers, where everyone knew his name, everyone was happy to see him and they were already a few steps ahead of showing him some things they thought he might like. Trey looked way more like a Hell's Angel than a musician, with long stringy salt-n-pepper hair that hung down just past his shoulders, and a shaggy beard that went down even further, stocky and swollen, with a voice that sounded like it had smoked five lifetimes of cigarettes in his sixty plus years on the planet. The giant Coke bottle bottom glasses stood out a bit, though.

But Kev knew that Trey was a hell of a guitarist, having been a guitar tech for Jane's Addiction, Nine Inch Nails, Ministry, Megadeath, Korn and a dozen other less famous bands. About six years ago, though, he'd gotten a major leg injury and couldn't move around anywhere near as well as he used to, so he'd taken his part job gig as a counter jockey at Caveman and turned it full time. Every so often, though, Kev had convinced Trey to play a bit, and every time was envious of the large man's ability to rip through a blistering lead line and make it look so incredibly effortless. He was going to have to consider bringing the man up as a session player from time to time.

Shopping for gear on someone else's budget was surreal, and he found himself having to remember that all of this would be expensed to the studio, and that while he was paying for it briefly, he wasn't really paying for it at the end of the day. Even still, he didn't want to go overboard, so he only picked up a handful of particularly key pieces of gear he knew he would need, as well as cable to get them all connected to his existing setup.

“Getting a new band together?” Trey asked him as he was ringing him up.

“Nah, doing some composing work for the Hollwoodland people.”

“Oh yeah? Anything I'd have heard of?”

“Nothing I can talk about right now, but I'm sure there'll be announcements in the next few months.”

“C'mon, Kev, we're old buds. Who'm I gonna tell?”

“My hands are tied, my friend, but I'm sure Variety'll have it pretty soon,” he said, putting down the credit card Elizabeth had given him.

“Okay okay, I'll stop asking then.”

“Thanks Trey. I appreciate it. I would if I could, but I can't.”

“Yeah yeah yeah, I get it, I get it. Just don't forget your buds when it comes time to the premiere, huh?”

“I'll make sure I've got a ticket with your name on it, Trey, assuming you can wait a year.”

“Hey, I've never been to a premiere yet, so it'll still be my first. You want Aneet to help you with the stuff to the car?”

“Yeah, that'd be great.”

With the back of his vehicle filled up, he called Natalie first, but she'd already gotten a ride back to the house on the earliest edge of rush hour, so the commute hadn't been brutal. She asked when he'd be back so she could prepare dinner, and he said he was going to check with Ashley, but he'd be home within ninety minutes if he didn't need to pick her up and two hours if he did. Natalie said she'd have dinner ready for two and a half hours from then, just to offer up some flexibility.

After that, he called Ashley, and she happily suggested he come and pick her up, having just finished up her day on campus, eager to head back to the house and glad to not have to take an Uber, so he took the Tesla over toward the UCLA campus. The car's navigation told him it would be far faster to stay on surface streets, so he did so, as rush hour was starting to evaporate, but still wasn't entirely gone

yet.

'Why couldn't Morgana have given me the gift of teleportation?' he thought to himself as he pulled up in front of the UCLA library where he saw Ashley and one of her friends waiting for him. The girl was dressed in sporty clothes, track pants and a track jacket, with a bright pink backpack slung over one shoulder. She had dark skin like unsweetened coffee, with black hair in a tightly curled afro that only extended an inch or so from her head. Ashley, on the other hand, was dressed as low key as possible, with jeans and a UCLA t-shirt on, her navy backpack also slung over one shoulder. She moved to hug her friend then half-walked, half-skipped over to the Tesla, hopping into the front seat, leaning over to kiss him hard, both of her hands holding onto his cheeks, before she finally pulled back and slumped into her seat, grabbing her seatbelt to strap herself in. "Thanks for picking me up!" she said to him, cheerily.

"That was quite the warm welcome you gave me," he said, tapping the accelerator to start the vehicle in motion again.

"Duh," she said, rolling her eyes in amusement. "I didn't want Sharice thinking you were my dad or anything, or that she had a shot with you." She grinned a little bit, shifting in her seat to sit as wide legged as possible. "Unless you wanted to have a shot with her. I could probs make that happen if you wanted. She'd totes tucker you out, though."

"Elizabeth is doing the scouting for the house, so I think you'd better talk to her if you're trying to get your little friends into my bed," Kevin said with a laugh.

"Don't be so uptight, Daddy," she giggled. "You don't have to keep everybody you fuck. Sometimes you can just fuck to fuck, y'know? We're sexual creatures, humans, and though we've been denying it, it's best to let our carnal natures come out from time to time. Get down, make love. Besides, she said you were cute, so I wouldn't mind if you just wanted to bang one out with her some time, simply to expand your college sampler platter."

"Are you two old friends?"

"Just met last week," Ashley said. "But she seems nice. We're gonna take Intro to Statistics together once classes start next month. I'm gonna be surrounded by co-ed pussy, Daddy, so you'd better get used to me bringing some home from time to time, although I'm gonna be on campus a lot more, so you better be willing to dick me down when I'm home."

"I'm sure we'll get it worked out at a level that's satisfying both you and me, Ashley."

"Oh, I totes gotta ask... you think you're gonna bang Alice Karteaux? Because she seems dope, and you two seem to get along pretty well."

"We're just co-workers, Ashley," Kevin said. "It'd be extremely unprofessional to do that, and besides, she hasn't shown any interest in me, and I already have the three of you at home, something I can't see Alice being all that into."

"Mmm." The tone the teenager gave seemed to convey she didn't entirely believe him. "Maybs consider asking her out after the movie's been released then. Just to see. You miss one hundred percent of the shots you don't take."

"That's months away, but I'll try to keep it mind," he said to her.

"You heard anything about this bodyguard candidate you're meeting with tomorrow?" she asked him. "I was trying to get Elizabeth to tell me a bit about her, but she's totes still miffed at me for telling you about Natalie before you met her."

"Not a whole lot," Kev admitted. "Only one detail in terms of her qualifications."

"Oh? What's that?"

"She's ex-Mossad."

"What's *that* mean?"

"The Mossad is the Israeli version of the CIA, I guess."

"Damn. Sound like a bad ass. Did Elizabeth tell you her name?"

"Miriam."

“Dope. Hope she's hot.”

“I would think being hot would be a handicap to being a spy,” Kevin said with a chuckle.

“You did say she was *ex*-Mossad. Maybs she was Too Hot To Spy.”

“I don't think that's a thing.”

“That's totes a thing.”

“Saying it's a thing doesn't *make* a thing.”

“It's totes a thing.”

“It's *not* a thing...”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“It's *totes* a thing.”

“You're so lucky you're cute,” he grumbled.

“And that I give great head! As reminder, tomorrow's wakeup blowjob day, so don't stay up too late.” She giggled, licking her lips. “I wanted to put it on your calendar, but Elizabeth wouldn't let me.”

“Maybe if you put it code.”

“I'll put it code!” she said excitedly. “The Spy Who Blew Me!”