

P.R.O.B.E.

THE DOOR WE FORGOT

BY JAMES HORNBY AND JAMES WYLDER



An Arcbeatle Press Publication

Copyright 2020 Arcbeatle Press, all rights reserved.

P.R.O.B.E is the property of Bill Baggs and BBV. Used under license.

The Shed Scales used with permission from Niki Haringsma

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to persons living or dead, events past or present, or other works is purely coincidental or done firmly within the realm of satire. Arcbeatle Press is located in Elkhart, Indiana

At the door they did remember, there was a package. This was fairly unusual, because no one there expected it, and the very nature of their work at the Preternatural Research Bureau meant packages weren't surprises. The P.R.O.B.E. team weren't so naive as to think no one knew their name. Trying to be a secret organization when your name was on the door sign was, after all, destined for failure. Even so, they had managed to slip under the radar fairly well.

So when they got the strange package, it was a matter of much curiosity. Maxie and Tasha peered over it, Maxie on her tiptoes, examining the bland exterior.

"I don't trust packages without a return address," Tasha said.

"Is that uncommon?" Maxie asked.

"... Do *you* get a lot of packages without return addresses?"

Maxie frowned, she didn't have to be snide about it. "Well what are we going to do, we either open it up or we don't."

Giles ran a hand through his hair, and then stroked it through again to put it in a ponytail.

"Is there any way we could check inside it?"

Maxie shook her head. "Not unless one of you is a secret wizard or has an X-Ray machine handy."

Agamyia, who was too tired for all this, threw her hands up. "Look, let's take a vote. Do we open it up or throw it out?"

"Open it," Maxie admitted.

"Open it," Tasha concurred, sadly.

"Open it," Giles muttered.

"There we go, problem solved. Tasha, you have a knife on you right? Can you do the honors?"

Tasha narrowed her eyes. "And why do you think I'd have a knife on me?"

"You have one, yes or no?"

"Okay, fine I do, but that's not the point..." She pulled it out, and slit the packing tape, then pulled the flaps of the lid open with a dramatic flourish.

They all surrounded the table, leaning in to peer into the box.

It was empty.

"Well that was a waste of everyone's time. Good work team," Agamyia said.

"No wait, look." Maxie pointed to the side of the box. There were characters

printed there... not letters. Runes? Sigils?

Before anyone could voice an opinion on Maxie's discovery, the lights began to flicker. With the first flash of darkness, a smoke rolled around them, black and weaving through the air like a snake in water. Sparks of electricity rippled through the smoke, pulsing with the fluorescent lights above them. Then the runes on the box began to glow, and disappeared. There was a burning on the back of Maxie's hand, and she looked down to see... it was there. The rune, the sigil, whatever it was: it was there on her skin. A smatter of similar lights showed she wasn't alone in it: they'd all been branded. The lights stabilized. The smoke vanished. The room seemed normal, aside from the glowing symbols on their hands. Her hand pulsed, burned. She could feel it sucking at her, drinking from her soul. They'd been cursed.

"I knew we shouldn't open it," Agamyia said.

"Oh hush." Tasha grimaced. "What the heck do we do now?"

Giles clapped, and all eyes turned to him. "We let something loose in here, so until further notice, we're on lockdown. No one goes in or out, understand? We're sealing all exits. Tasha and I will start that, Maxie and Agamyia will start trying to figure out what this is all about."

"I can tell one thing already," Maxie said, "it's sucking our souls."

Agamyia scowled. "You're serious? How do you even know that?"

"I can feel it, can't all of you?"

Tasha shook her head, and Giles gestured for her attention, "Some folks have a keener tie to that part of themselves."

Tasha nodded, "What's it feel like then, Maxie?"

"Like a leech, sucking just a little bit at a time, nothing that won't grow back if we can figure this out in time..."

"And if we can't?" Tasha asked.

"Well I genuinely don't know what would happen, but nothing good."

Giles rubbed his forehead, alright. Worse to worse. "Alright, any other questions?"

Maxie raised a hand like a nervous student.

"Yes, Maxie?"

"What about, you know," she moved her shoulders up and down, which seemed to be trying to communicate something, not that the others grasped it, "our guest."

Giles sighed. "Let him read his book."

* * *

Well, at least the meeting hadn't been a total disaster. Sure, they'd unleashed a potentially horrible fate on themselves, but on the plus side Maxie would get the afternoon to herself. Or at least she tried to tell herself that as she made her way down the main hallway of P.R.O.B.E. Headquarters toward her office. Her attempt to cheer herself up wasn't too successful. The problem lingered at the corner of every thought.

Maxie grimaced, holding her hand up to the light as though it would let her see through the skin. See how deep the sigil had implanted itself. Sucking on her soul? Well, souls were real so chock up one for whoever had that on their bingo card.

The lights flickered. Was that... door there before? She could have sworn it was just white wall—that horrible shade of white available in cheap cans and spread on everything here like butter on bread.

Bread. Why did they "raise" their bread here too? Just make it flat, no one cares. But she had grumbled enough. If she was stuck here at work, she might as well get her work done as quickly as possible so she could spend the rest of the afternoon playing through Super Mario Brothers 3, and wrap up her notes on it. The sigil itched on her hand. It was cold, the heat of her body draining into it.

Stop thinking about it. Get some coffee.

As she entered the break room, she scooted around Sir Bedevere of the Round Table—who was very focused on a copy of *Wuthering Heights*—trying to keep as much distance as possible from their, hopefully temporary, guest. She felt her hand tug towards his, an echoing whisper in her head. She had to expect weird things with someone who was, at least in practical terms, a ghost. She wasn't familiar with Arthurian legends, but Giles had explained it was absolutely the wrong millenium for Bedevere to be hanging out in. She felt the tug on her hand again. *No*. She pushed past it, and put the kettle on. Bedevere looked at it. She nodded.

"Weird huh?"

"I still don't understand how it's powered by lightning."

Maxie shrugged, and made her cup of instant coffee. Did it taste good? Absolutely not.

"Hey, Bedevere, you dealt with magical enchantments back in your day, right?"

He nodded. "King Arthur was bewitched several times, by himself."

"Any tips?"

"Not really, I can't say we handled it well, what with Mordred and all."

She nodded, lips pursed, and raised her mug in salute. She ignored Tasha as she tried to say hello in the hallway, then ignored Agamyra as she tried to pass another job off onto her, and shut the door to her office. The lights were off. She

swore she hadn't turned them off when she left the room? There couldn't be a new energy policy, she'd have been the one forced to implement it after all.

She flicked the lights on.

At her desk was a corpse.

The cut across the top of the head—revealing the somewhat pulped brain—made it clear that she was dead. But she looked at Maxie with sad eyes.

“You left me behind.”

Maxie froze, but her hands shook, dribbling coffee down her wrists. *She couldn't be here.* This was some sort of hallucination. A trick of her mind.

She tilted her head, which did disgusting things to it, the purple hair hanging to the side. “What did you do to your hair? I can't say I like it. Or that sweater.”

Maxie gritted her teeth. “I'm in my office. I'm in my office. I can smell coffee.” She rubbed two of her fingers together, savoring the sensation.

“You know, if you'd just turned around and helped me, maybe I'd have lived. Maybe you wouldn't have had to flee.”

It was a lie. Maxie knew it was a lie.

The lights flickered.

And all there was, was an office.

* * *

Outside Maxie's office, things were taking a turn for the worse. The floor of the main hall was slowly being blanketed by a thick layer of black smoke. The P.R.O.B.E. team went about their day oblivious, even as the sigils tattooed across their skin glowed in the smoke's presence. As time progressed, the smoke grew thicker. Purposeful tendrils of the smoke snaked out from the main body and hugged tight to the floor. Each tendril picked out a member of the team and headed in their direction, avoiding chair legs, sofas, and even the deactivated remnants of an alien nuclear warhead in an effort not to be seen by their targets. As the smoke billowed close to its victims, the first one to notice it was Agamya. She gasped and turned to warn the others. Too late. The smoke had her.

Agamya panicked. The smoke had enveloped her completely. Where had it come from? How had it got into P.R.O.B.E. HQ? The mystical and technological protections over the building should keep out almost anything. Agamya groaned. Maxie and Giles had been the ones to set them up. She'd have to redo them; yet another job for her growing to-do-list.

Agamya's panic soon faded as she forgot whatever it was she'd been scared

about. *I'm in P.R.O.B.E. HQ, what could possibly threaten me here?*

Agamyia suddenly realised how dark it was. Had Giles forgotten to pay the electric bill again? She headed for the light switch, when the sound of footsteps subverted her attention. Something else accompanied the footsteps—a cane? Agamyia was caught unawares as a childhood memory leapt to the forefront of her mind: her grandfather hobbled into her childhood home, carrying with him more wondrous tales of adventure. She shook her head. Where did that come from?

Agamyia turned to confront the source of the noise. Her jaw fell open when she was greeted by the sight of that very same grandfather. He still had his wizened beard, curly and soft to the touch. His eyes still held the wisdom of his advanced years. It was him. There was no doubt about it. But how?

“Grandfather, how can this be?” said Agamyia, on impulse switching to her native language. “You died when I was a girl.”

Her grandfather ignored her questions. “You’ve forgotten your faith,” he said. “You disappoint me.”

“Grandfather, no!” Agamyia protested. “I still pray five times a day, just like you taught me.”

“Prayer is not the only proof of faith. This job is challenging your beliefs. Soon the sweet little girl I remember will be gone, replaced by a heartless sceptic.”

The comment stabbed right through her tough exterior. Before his death, Agamyia hung on her grandfather’s every word. To know he thought so little of her was like a dagger through her heart. “Please, Grandfather. I can change.”

“I must hear you pray tawbah. On your knees.”

Agamyia did as he asked. She prayed for what felt like hours. Even then, she doubted it would be enough.

* * *

Sir Bedevere wasn’t certain exactly how long ago it had been since his time. Giles had told him he was “From a Time of Myths and Legends, AD” which was not actually helpful. He didn’t understand a lot of things, but he understood more things than everyone expected. Not that a lot of that was superbly useful, but yes, he could use the magic glowing slate. You just hit the little pictures on it with your finger and it did things, it wasn’t that hard. Merlin had had one, anyway.

Merlin.

He set his copy of *Wuthering Heights* down. He was almost done (the printing press was a great invention to note), but the thoughts of the past were overwhelming the finale for him. The lights flickered. In that space between the light and the shadows, there were eyes. The flicker continued, and there he was: his king.

Cleashaven, his face still boyish, but his eyes deep with regret. A lock of blonde hair down either temple, the rest tied with a braid into a bun. Blood streaked his face and had stained the blue cloth between his armor. King Arthur, lord of the Britons. A hole in his side from Mordred's blade.

"Sir Bedevere."

He dropped from his chair to one knee, listening to Arthur's labored breathing. Those same dark breaths he'd given under the tree at Camalan...

"Where is my sword, Bedevere?"

"I threw it in the lake, Your Highness."

Wet footsteps, from bloodsoaked stockings, came near to him, and a cold hand lifted his chin up. "Did you not know, Sir Bedevere, that if you had not thrown Excalibur in the lake, I would have never died even to this foreign year?"

His eyes went wide. A line of blood flowed into Arthur's eyes, the red and blue mixing. Bedevere averted his gaze.

"I..." he strained for his response, but the light flickered, and he was alone again.

* * *

Wisps of smoke licked at Tasha's ankles. She looked down and suddenly everything became hard to see, like she was eight shots down and counting. She blinked, willing her eyes to refocus.

A woman stood in front of her. Tasha didn't recognise her at first. Then her fringe and bright smile tugged at her memories, digging up a face long since buried in the depths of childhood trauma. Tasha felt like a schoolgirl again. "Mama? Is it really you?"

"I'm here, sweetie." Her smile was just as Tasha remembered. Memories of sweet summer nights in the family holiday home danced through her head. For a moment Tasha thought she could smell the scents rolling in from the meadow. Tasha closed her eyes. The feeling was bliss.

When Tasha opened her eyes, everything changed.

A much darker memory of her mother greeted her. Blotches of decayed skin peppered her face. These were her mother's final days, when the illness had done its work. Tasha had been seven when her mother died. Looking back Tasha saw it as the day her childhood ended. Babysitters and nannies were no replacement for someone who really cared. Her father had never been there for her, not truly. All he cared about was his career. Her mother had all the time for her in the world. Her father barely managed a phone call at the weekends.

"I miss you, Mama."

Her mother seemed not to hear. A cruel smile crept across her lips. "I held so much hope for you, Tasha. I thought you'd be a nurse, a doctor even. Just look at you: every inch your father's daughter." She spat the words like venom. "He was a soldier, you know, in the Falklands. He thought it wouldn't change him, said he'd got out in time. We both know that wasn't the case."

"I'm not a soldier, Mama," Tasha protested. "I work for the government. I make the world a better place!"

Her mother harrumphed. "Your father told me the same thing: that politics would make him a better man. Who'd ever believe a comment like that? Your stupid old mother, that's who! I should have got out when I had the chance, never had you at all."

Tasha sobbed. "No, Mama. This isn't you!"

The spectre of Tasha's mother cackled. The sound gnawed at Tasha's ears. Tasha threw her hands up, but it was too much. She fell to the floor and cried until she could cry no more.

* * *

Giles looked to his left. Tasha stood by the water cooler. It looked like she was talking to it. A faint haze surrounded her body. She was enveloped by smoke.

"Tasha, who are you talking to? There's no one—"

The smoke took him too.

Giles squinted as a man stepped out of the darkness. He was dressed in khaki trousers and combat boots. His face was stern; he'd seen battle before. When Giles locked eyes on him, he crumpled. Giles' hands flew to his face, shielding his eyes. Was he dreaming? Giles only ever saw the face when he was asleep; it tormented him in the darkest of his nightmares.

"Archie..."

He looked exactly as Giles remembered him; right down to the scar on his cheek he'd received after Dr Haggard sent him to Helsinki in search of a vampire nest. Upon his return Giles and Archie had celebrated for a straight week. They'd even taken on a pack of Shed Scales six pints down. Giles looked back on those times as the greatest of his life. If only things hadn't ended the way they did.

"You left me, Giles." Archie's voice had a mesmeric quality to it. Giles felt as though he'd walked in on one of his own nightmares. This time he didn't have the solace of knowing he would wake up.

"Archie, I..." Giles was at a loss for words. He stared at the impossible figure and all the trauma came back. The events in Manchester spun around like a carousel in his mind. The merry-go-round refused to stop; the cellar, the ritual, the bodies...

“Save your excuses, Giles. You didn’t even try to save me. You just turned your back and ran. You’re no field agent, not fit to lead a team of others. You’ll always be the technician, hiding in Dr Haggard’s shadow.”

“No!” Giles’ voice echoed around the walls, as though the room was empty. “It wasn’t like that, Archie. I messed up. I failed.”

“That you did. And who’s to say it won’t happen to the others? They rely on you, hang on your every word. When they’re at their worst and they need you, will you leave them too?”

“No, I’d never. I’d—”

“You’d what, Giles? I know you have the best intentions, but so do most people. The best intentions always go right out the window when things get real. Just like your promises.”

Giles shook his head. “It won’t be like that. It won’t.”

Giles repeated the words until his despair swallowed him whole.

* * *

Maxie sat at her desk and set about cataloguing the mountain of alien tech in front of her. She kept glancing at the clock in the corner of her computer screen, working out how much time she’d get on Super Mario Brothers 3. Looking back to the mountain of tech, she decided she’d call it a day after she got to the Voltron hand blaster. She had been here all night, after all.

Maxie lifted her head. There was talking outside. That wasn’t unusual in itself; there were three other people on the team, not counting Sir Bedevere. No one ever counted him. What was unusual was the pitch of the voices. Those weren’t the stable tones of casual conversation. Someone was in distress.

Pushing back her chair, Maxie headed for the door. Outside were Agamyra, Tasha, Giles and Sir Bedevere, all a considerable distance from each other. Each of them were on their knees in floods of tears. She froze at the sight.

What the hell?

She crept closer, eyeing them carefully. They all appeared to be talking to some invisible presence in the room, babbling, clutching at their faces. Things had gone from bad to terribly, horribly wrong, and she was clueless as to why.

Okay, Maxie, chin up. Deep breaths. Focus on where you are. On your breaths. Figuring this out is up to you... for some reason.

She approached Giles, but he flailed an arm out. “I failed him!” he cried out. She

stepped backwards. A no go. She would have liked Giles to be her go to. She could have taken the responsibility off herself then. She looked at the group, trying to get a read on them.

She wouldn't say Sir Bedevere looked great, but she zeroed in on him as he seemed to be holding together better than the others. Still, his eyes looked empty, his shoulders were slumped. He had a truly knightly posture and watching him fold in on himself like this was worse to see than she expected. She knelt down in front of him.

"Sir Bedevere. Can you hear me? You know I'm next to you?"

He nodded.

"What the hell is happening?"

"I've failed him. Failed my King."

"Sure, but that was a long time ago. Hey, don't look away from me." She snapped a few times and got his attention back. "You're a Knight of the Round Table. Or, were, I guess."

"One never leaves the service of their King."

She heard Giles wail, and clenched her fist, putting her fingernails into her palm; it wasn't the greatest way to ground herself. "I can't do this alone, Bedevere. So why are you and I the only ones holding together. We can't lie down and die."

"Arthur did. Under a tree."

Could she put a hand on the ghost? Sometimes he was physically there with a body she could touch, sometimes he wasn't, and she hadn't bothered to read up on the difference. Gently, carefully, she put a hand on his shoulder. It met the cloth of his shirt. "Then why are you okay, and they aren't?"

He shrugged. "I've had centuries to dwell on my regret."

She frowned and thought back to her own visions in those flickering lights. The sigil on her hand still glowed. Visions of the dead...

It hit her. That these were people they'd lost wasn't the issue it was... what did Giles call it? Blue tuna? Red herring?

It was her deep and undying regret. That nagging feeling that if she'd only turned around, if she'd only stopped being selfish in saving her own life... she held that regret close. Held it tight. But she'd learned to manage it (thanks therapy), learned to hold back that tide in her heart threatening to drown her.

"Sir Bedevere, that's it. It's their regrets. It's... ours." She bit her lip, "Would your King want you to leave me to fight this battle alone?"

He looked up at her, eyes wide, spider-webbed and red. “The shame would kill me again.”

“Then rise, Sir Bedevere, and help me get our team back. Even Tasha.”

She pulled him to his feet... Well, he did most of the work cause she wasn't very strong (she intentionally didn't think about how a ghost could have weight), and led him by the hand to the team. They were curled up fetally, shaking. Faces covered by clenched hands. “We need to remind them where they are. You can take Tasha.”

“I don't know anything about Tasha.”

She sighed. “I'll take Tasha. You work on Agamya.”

Kneeling down in front of Tasha, Maxie placed her hand on Tasha's. “Hey.”

One eye poked out from the fingers.

“Remember me?”

Tasha nodded.

“There's something really bothering you right now isn't there?”

She cried, and nodded.

“Someone you lost, someone you wish things had ended differently with?”

The eye showed recognition, but she didn't nod.

Maxie kept going, “Can you feel my hand? I'm here, right now, maybe that's not the ideal situation for either of us, but I need you to remember you're in this room, with me, right now. My stupid cold hand on yours. Because we can't let those people down, the people we lost? We have to keep moving, get moving, or we'll let them down again. And we'll let ourselves down too. So can you feel my hand?”

Tasha moved, and wiped her face. “Yeah.”

Maxie let out a big sigh of relief.

“Then let's get Giles up. And we can figure out what the hell is going on here.”

They did. And as the group sat together, bleary eyed and bedraggled, eyeing their glowing hands, they set to work again. As P.R.O.B.E. must.

* * *

Giles paced the room. “We need to work out how this happened.”

Tasha rolled her eyes. “Points for the bleeding obvious.”

Giles scowled at her. “The sigils themselves aren’t strong enough carriers of energy to explain what just happened. There must be something else nearby.”

The team scanned the room for anything out of the ordinary. In P.R.O.B.E. HQ, that was quite a challenge. Something caught Maxie’s attention. She skirted over to Agamyra and took her hand.

“What are you doing?” Agamyra exclaimed, pulling back her hand.

Maxie held firm. “The sigils on your skin shine brighter than everyone else’s. Why is that?” Catching sight of her own sigil tattoos, Maxie leapt back. “Now mine are too!”

“You must be close to the source,” said Giles. As he walked over to them, the sigils on his skin shone brighter too. “Whatever’s causing this, it’s somewhere in your vicinity.”

They checked the immediate area. Agamyra rifled through drawers of old trinkets for anything untoward. Her search came up empty.

Maxie paced around, staring at the sigils on her hand. She stopped before an old wood door. Her eyes widened. “I noticed this door earlier,” she said. “How have I never seen it before?” She paused to get a closer look. Etched into the wood were strange symbols. Black smoke crept through the small gap at its base. “I’ve experienced too much weirdness since working here to believe in coincidences.”

“Oh dear,” said Giles.

Tasha rounded on him. “You know what this is, don’t you?”

“It’s an Algea. Related to Oizys, the Greek goddess of anxiety, grief, depression—that whole guff. Archie and I imprisoned it behind the door not long after we relocated here from Parliament Square. We used its own technology against it to cloak the door so no one would notice it. The sigils must have negated it: this has all been a ritual allowing its influence to seep out.”

“Any idea how to open it?” asked Agamyra.

“Easy,” said Tasha. “Kick it in like you would any door.”

Tasha stepped forward and slammed her boot into the door. It didn’t budge. Tasha fell away clutching at her foot.

“All brawn and no brains,” said Agamyra. “Typical Tasha.”

“I’d like to see you do better,” Tasha said through gritted teeth.

“Girls, stop bickering. If I had a pound for every time I said that in a day I’d be Boris Johnson. Please don’t make me Boris Johnson.” Giles stepped towards the door and examined the runes etched into the wood. “The language of the Algea is

ancient Greek—don't ask, it's a long story." He drummed his fingers against his jeans. "Oh, if only I'd not been lazy and done the work myself."

Agamyia smirked. "Bites you in the ass eventually, doesn't it?"

Bedevere strolled past, flicking through his copy of *Wuthering Heights*. "Merlin would know! That ginger-haired magician and his box of tricks would have this beast crawling back to the depths whence it came!"

"Not helping, Bedevere," said Tasha.

Rolling his eyes, the knight wandered to the other end of the room, and sat down to finish his book.

Giles screwed his eyes shut as a flicker of recognition sparked in his brain. "Wait, wait. I remember the incantation." He grinned. "We're all set to break the seal. All we need now is a sharpened olive tree branch dipped in lamb's blood. The cocktail of chemicals the combination contains is fatal to an Algea."

Maxie and Agamyia exchanged looks. "We should have those in storage."

"Hurry." Giles placed a hand on the door. "I'm going in."

* * *

"Αβοίγω."

With an ear-splitting creak, the age-old door slid open. The darkness within was swamped by the artificial light from outside. From the threshold Giles could see the creature back away. After so long in the darkness, who could blame it?

"Hi there," he called to the creature. "Remember me?"

The Algea hissed. It remembered him all right.

Giles stepped into the room. Tasha covered him from the doorway, pointing her sidearm inside, for all the good it would do.

"Nice work you did out there. Our minds aren't played with often enough, we really appreciate it."

The creature hissed once more. Adjusting to the light, it crept out of its hiding place. The Algea had the appearance of a raven-haired woman, veiled in a dress of smoke. Floating across the floor towards Giles, it stopped two metres away, and regarded him carefully. "You resist my powers."

"Our regrets may hurt, but they don't hold us in one place. Life has to move on, even though the pain stays with us."

The Algea licked its lips. "Your pain is deep. The regret you feel for your fallen friend tasted ever so sweet."

Giles heard a muted argument between Agamyra and Tasha behind him. They were back with the olive tree branch. Giles took a step towards the creature. "That was the mistake you made today. Our histories and pain are ours to bear alone. The last time we defeated you I was merciful. Locking you in here was the kind thing to do. And how do you repay that kindness? By slipping back into our heads, feeding on the memories that affect us most. This time I won't be so merciful. Remember you brought this on yourself." He sidestepped. "Tasha now!"

Tasha came charging into the room like a highland warrior. She let loose her battle cry, holding the olive tree branch like a spear. The tip of it dripped with thick red blood.

Upon seeing Tasha, the Algea howled in fear. It sought a place to hide, but there was none. The room was her prison, it wasn't built to be spacious. With nowhere to go the Algea was helpless to prevent Tasha from thrusting the branch through its heart. It had eaten so many regrets, fears, terrors, despairs... and at that moment its eyes mellowed as though it had thought, "Ah, so this is what it feels like." But it was fleeting, for the moment the tip of the branch made contact, the creature's form began to disintegrate. Seconds later a pool of ash was all that remained.

Giles dusted off his hands. "Now that's settled, let's close this door forever. Some places in this world should stay forgotten."

Looking warily over her shoulder, Tasha made for the exit. Giles was close behind. Once they were outside, he pulled on the handle, making sure the door was firmly closed. Then he placed his hand on the wood and said, "κλείς."

With the sound of a key turning in a lock, the door shuddered. Seconds later the door vanished, spirited away to be forgotten once more. This time Giles intended it to be permanent.

* * *

Once the crisis had passed, the P.R.O.B.E. team gathered in the main hall. For the longest time they remained silent, stewing on the memories the Algea had churned up. The creature had known them so intimately, better than most of them had known themselves. It had challenged their core ideals, and each member of the team used the silence to reflect on how they would move on from here.

Tasha was the first to break the silence, much to the relief of the others. "So we've no idea who sent the sigils?" she asked, scratching at a glyph on her forearm.

"Nope," said Giles. "Looks like P.R.O.B.E. has acquired itself a new enemy. Let 'em join the queue, I say!"

"When do you think they'll go away?" Agamyra held up her hands. The supernatural symbols still covered her skin, albeit fainter than before.

"They'll clear up in a few hours," said Maxie. "I hope."

“We’ll have to stay indoors until they do,” said Giles. “We can’t risk passing it onto the public.”

Tasha huffed. “Well if we’re here for the long haul, I’m grabbing a drink. Anybody want one?”

Giles held up his hand. “I’ll have one.”

Maxie drummed her fingers against her neck. “I’ll have a bottle of the brown stuff that makes my throat tingle.”

“Whiskey it is,” Tasha called back.

“Smoothie for me,” said Agamya.

“I’m not mashing up fruit for you. You can make that yourself.”

“Play nice, Tasha!” Giles called after her. “We’re going to be here all night, remember!”

“At least,” added Maxie glumly.

Five minutes later Tasha returned with the drinks.

Maxie cleared a desk, and the P.R.O.B.E. team sat around it. Over the next few hours they shared tales of the people they’d seen in the room. Tasha told them about her mother, the games they used to play when she was young. Maxie recounted a vague story which Giles had to interject several locations and proper nouns in as she went, but everyone just let that slide. Bedevere told a tale of the Round Table, and defeating a knight clad in red who guarded a mill which churned wheat that let you see in the darkness. Agamya recounted her grandfather’s stories and was shocked at how clearly she remembered them.

Giles was the only one who refused to share. He remained quiet, sipping his drink as he listened to their tales. When his turn came he simply smiled. He decided not to tell them about Archie. They’d only worry. They were his team and, for the remainder of their isolation, he had to be the one to keep their spirits up.

“So,” Tasha shifted, “we all saw something from our past, didn’t we? A person we had regrets tied to?”

Agamya nodded. “It feels dirty that thing used that against us.”

“We’ve all seen things we wish we hadn’t, we’ve all lived, and if you live through enough, you have something you regret. That you wish was different,” Giles said.

“But you’re still here, we’re still here, even when we’ve lost things that are important to us, that we can’t get back,” Maxie cut in with surprising earnestness. She raised her glass to the group. “We still have each other. Close together, at a distance, even with our differences, we do what we need to do to survive. And we

live in that time. Even when it sucks.”

Tasha grinned. “Cheers to that!” The glasses clinked.

“Well, how are we going to spend the rest of the time we have here, team?” Giles asked.

“This?” Agamyra gestured to the circle of friends, as Tasha began singing a pop song Maxie’s confused expression revealed she had never heard of.

“Yeah,” he answered. “Sounds like a perfect day.”

/fin

P.R.O.B.E will return with new adventures from Arcbeatle Press! Watch for Out of the Shadows, the upcoming book that takes the new P.R.O.B.E team on wild journeys through the mystical and alien!

Find out more at <https://www.arcbeatlepress.com/probe>