

the Magical History of Knox County

Episode 4

MORDECAI: From all of us in the station, welcome back. I'm Mordecai Dogwood, and this is the Magical History of Knox County.

"Animale" theme plays.

MORDECAI: After last week's broadcast, I started questioning everything I thought I knew about magic. The romance tree and the magical creatures proved one thing – magic is not a force to be trifled with. There's still so much about it that we don't understand. I had so many questions, but I had a feeling the most qualified person to answer them was Abigail. So, we were all pretty excited when she called in again two days ago. Unfortunately, she still wasn't able to tell us much. At all.

Tape starts.

The office phone rings. Thudding footsteps.

MORDECAI: I got it!

NED: No, I got it! Hello?

ABIGAIL: It's really important. It's really big, and it's going to keep me out of the office for quite some time I think.

NED: Abigail! Are you okay?

ABIGAIL: No need to come looking for me. (static) I'll be back as soon as I can. Nothing's going to happen to me, but even if it does, I trust you to handle-handle everything-

NED: Wait! Where are you?

Dial tone.

NED: Abigail? Abigail? Hello?

MORDECAI: What...I don't understand. That's all she had to say?

NED: She must have a good reason, Mordecai! Maybe she can't tell us more. She must be onto something huge.

Tape stops.

MORDECAI: Anyway, I decided to sit down and begin going through Abigail's old notes. I realized pretty quickly that this was a much larger task than I'd thought. There's a whole side office devoted to her notes and old tapes, and her files are pretty disorganized-

NED: It's just her system, Mordecai.

Tape starts.

MORDECAI: So this is day four of my investigation of Abigail's old notes, and I'm on hour three of the joint JFK sasquatch abduction folder. It's hard to uh... decipher. We have this bit of paper from the secretary of defense that reads: "And twofold we wrote across the stump: Lord Kennedy give back the child whose fate decides the shifting earths or from beyond the chefferobe will rise the darkened Gupper whose name is Wind Through the Reeds..."

A page flips, more paper rustles.

NED: Ha. This next page is a shot from *Disney's Snow White*...where the dwarves have yellow eyes.

MORDECAI: It's... yeah. At this rate it'll take months of research to find any clues where she went.

Tape stops.

MORDECAI: By the end of the week, I was pretty worried we'd hit a wall. I had no leads. I needed to get to know Abigail's world more - how she operated, who she talked with. Unfortunately no obvious clues were presenting themselves. At least, not until 4:00 AM Friday morning. I had crashed late the night before, perusing some of Abigail's files on possible UFO sightings - which she had been pretty skeptical of - and I had hoped to sleep in a little. But, I worked out pretty quick it just wasn't going to be my night.

Tape starts.

Cell phone buzzing incessantly. Fabric rustles.

MORDECAI: What- rgh - where - Hello. Hello?

RIDDLE TOAD: Greetings, Chronicler.

MORDECAI: What – is this Riddle Toad?

RIDDLE TOAD: Indeed. I am calling to inform you that there is a tragedy of epic proportions unfolding before me...it might make an excellent subject for one of your...audio novellas.

MORDECAI: What - it's 4:13 AM!

RIDDLE TOAD: Your gifts for stating the obvious are to be admired.

MORDECAI: Uh uh. No way, not again. Try again in five hours. You can't keep / calling me

RIDDLE TOAD: You should also know that said tragedy is intertwined: with the fate of my old friend, the divinely voiced Abigail Redwine. The game is afoot, Chronicler.

Pause.

MORDECAI: Where should I meet you?

Tape stops.

MORDECAI (STATION): After getting dressed and chugging a cup of coffee, I set out. The night sky was just fading from black to deep blue. Following the Riddle Toad's instructions, I drove to a concrete bridge that crossed the Kokosing river. Looking down, I could see a truck had rolled off it. The guardrail had been twisted outward. The truck itself was half submerged in the muddy river. Then I saw a swarm of police cruisers parked beneath the bridge. They had formed a partial perimeter around the overturned 18-wheeler, headlights focused on the truck. I looked more closely, and saw the back doors of the truck's trailer had broken off their hinges, and their center was bulged out from a hard impact. I pulled over.

Tape starts.

A car door slams. Slight wind, and an occasional bird sings. The spring peepers are chirping in the background. Footsteps on gravel. Occasionally, we hear the bark of a short police siren.

MORDECAI (FIELD): Um, so I've just pulled off to the side. Looks like the truck rolled right off the bridge, and fell into the river. The, um, cab is completely underwater, but the trailer is only ... half submerged? Two thirds? Half submerged.

POLICE: What the hell. Identify yourself!

MORDECAI: Mordecai Dogwood, Magical History of Knox County-

POLICE: Yeah I'm sorry but press aren't allowed past the cordon.

MORDECAI: Um, I was called here about a magical event? I got a call from - woah!

A thunderous roar, tires squeal and grind over gravel. Doors open, and then slam.

DIVODIT: Alright, we made it. Give us the bad news.

POLICE: Oh. You two.

LUMILY: What've we got?

POLICE: Why don't you come and see?

MORDECAI: Um-

DIVODIT: Oh good morning Mordecai, glad you could make it. Officer, let the reporter in – he's with us.

Tape stops.

MORDECAI: Lumily and Divodit, the two local experts on Magical fauna, had just pulled up in a large armored vehicle, more fit for a squad of riot cops. The policeman grudgingly lifted the tape, and I hurried after them.

Tape starts.

Crunching gravel.

DIVODIT: Did you find the drivers?

POLICE: What's left of them.

LUMILY: Describe.

POLICE: Couple of fingers, an ear-

LUMILY: Class 9. At least. Ok, back your guys up. Give us at least a 100 yard radius.

POLICE: (grudgingly) Fine.

He crunches away over the beach.

MORDECAI: So, um, what is this?

DIVODIT: What you're looking at here is pure evil, Morty. More than likely this truck was running something for the illegal wildlife trade. Looks like one of their specimens got loose.

MORDECAI: What - it rolled the truck and killed the drivers?

DIVODIT: Something like that. Let's see...aha! Here!

MORDECAI (VO): Divodit knelt down next to a large three-toed footprint.

DIVODIT: Lumily?

LUMILY: Tusked Boojum. Probably an adult male. In heat.

DIVODIT: Just what I was thinking. 200 kilos or so. Probably carried off the drivers to decorate its nest. We'll go after him in a minute. Let's double check the truck first.

MORDECAI: I'm sorry, but what's a...?

DIVODIT: Sort of a saurian lizard-pig with mood swings.

MORDECAI: Ok. So what would someone want with something like that?

LUMILY: We'll show you. Come on.

MORDECAI (VO): She opened the doors of the truck. We stepped in.

Creaking hinges.

DIVODIT: Watch your step, lad.

MORDECAI: Um, for all listeners, I'm in the back of this truck. There are cages running down the length of the truck, and, um, a shape in the back. It's moving. It's, oh no, it's looking at us--

RIDDLE TOAD: And is not terribly impressed by what he sees.

MORDECAI: Oh. You.

MORDECAI (VO): I found myself looking into the marble-like eyes of the Riddle Toad. He was sitting in the back of the truck, covering the entire surface of a spare tire.

RIDDLE TOAD: Tread softly, Chronicler.

MORDECAI (VO): I looked down at what I thought was an enormous shag carpet. A large red eye opened and rolled around, looking at me.

MORDECAI (FIELD): What is that?

DIVODIT: Manta snark...and it looks like someone sedated him.

MORDECAI: So... what is it?

LUMILY: Basically a two-ton anti-snake.

MORDECAI: I'm sorry, but I'm a little confused. This truck is part of the wildlife trade?

LUMILY: Like, you probably know that people collect parts or specimens of endangered species. The magical wildlife trade is analogous.

RIDDLE TOAD: Barely. Panda blood doesn't turn you to stone.

DIVODIT: And the trade's causing the next great extinction. Species are getting wiped out all over the map. Never, never, never buy a crocodile-skin handbag, or a kelpie-fang bracelet.

MORDECAI: So this truck was transporting these things to sell them.

LUMILY: Right. Look at these fire frogs. See how they barely glow? This cage is way too small.

RIDDLE TOAD: Charlie's been stuffed and mounted in the back! Murderers.

DIVODIT: Charlie?

RIDDLE TOAD: A friend, but mostly a sphinx. Until recently.

MORDECAI: And where were these creatures being taken

RIDDLE TOAD: That's why I summoned you, Chronicler. I found this letter in the glove compartment. Addressed to Silas Winters.

DIVODIT: I'll kill him with my bare hands.

LUMILY: There are worse things than death.

DIVODIT: Good point. Let's try those.

MORDECAI: Silas Winters?

RIDDLE TOAD: He owns an apothecary outside of Mt. Vernon. A shady individual, to say the least. Let's pay him a visit. Chronicler, you're with me.

DIVODIT: Excellent. Give him what for from us, eh?

LUMILY: We'll pick up the Boojum.

MORDECAI: What? I'm not going with you to meet some, some...criminal guy.

RIDDLE TOAD: I'm not going alone, Chronicler. I'm a toad.

MORDECAI: Look, shouldn't we let the police handle this first?

RIDDLE TOAD: Indeed. Conveniently, the last time I saw Abigail Redwine was in his apothecary.

MORDECAI: ...When was this?

RIDDLE TOAD: Two months ago.

Pause. Tape stops.

MORDECAI (VO): We got in my car - the Toad refused to explain how he got out here - and we drove to Silas Winter's Emporium. On the way, I called the station to leave a message for Ned.

Phone Ringing.

NED (answering machine): This is the Magical History of Knox County. Speak. Maybe We'll respond. Someday-

Ned picks up. She is breathing hard.

NED: Hello!?!

MORDECAI: Wow. What are you doing in the station at 6:30 in the morning?

NED: ...Maybe I work here, Mordecai. What is it?

MORDECAI: I just wanted to let you know I'm driving to Silas Winters' Emporium with the Riddle Toad.

NED: Um, that's a terrible idea. It's, like, on the Guineas Book of World Records' top ten list for most worrying buildings.

MORDECAI: Yeah, I got that impression. Problem is, Riddle Toad tells me that it's one of the last places Abigail was seen.

NED: ...Fine. Don't die.

MORDECAI: Sure...what exactly are you working on?

Click. Dial tone.

MORDECAI (VO): Silas Winter's complex was deep in the forest, in the ruins of Ursa County USA. Ursa County was a wildlife park, about an acre in size, a swath of prairie cut into the trees like a bald patch. The road was rough gravel, and on both sides were rusted barbed wire fencing. Nobody knew what happened to the park, one day it was here, the next day a bunch of dark vans with tinted windows drove through, and the third day there was nothing, no animals or people. In the middle is the former visitor's center: a faux log hunting lodge. Where the sign had once said Ursa County, there was now a large piece of scrap metal, glowing with heat as if pulled from a forge, which read Silas Winter's Emporium and Bar. If you were quiet, you could hear music from the inside.

RIDDLE TOAD: Remember Chronicler, "Those who hunt monsters are monsters themselves."

MORDECAI (FIELD): What, like literally?

RIDDLE TOAD: Does it matter? Just don't make eye contact, and for the love of all that is holy, tip generously.

The door creaks open. Footsteps on creaky floor boards.

MORDECAI: Ok, so, um, we're inside the emporium. It's a whole room filled with shelves, like a bookstore or dried goods store. Everything on the shelves is...a little odd. ...Murky jars of formaldehyde, shimmering books bound in... Leather? Hopefully? And uh... wow. Those are pretty big mirrors just... floating in midair and now they flew away... okay.

MORDECAI (VO): We crept through the shelves. Dust winked in the sunbeams. I passed jars of gold scarab beetles, lizard skulls with four eye sockets, bottles and jars of medicine marked with labels like "anti-grav mortar" and "pickled gnomes." In the back, a large stuffed lion with wings stood on its hind legs.

RIDDLE TOAD: Steve. And so goes the last of the sphinxes.

MORDECAI: So who is this "Silas Winters" guy?

RIDDLE TOAD: Poacher, drug runner, and money enthusiast. Anything shady in the county, magical or non-magical, Winters no doubt has a hat in the ring. He is a giant among men, the Napoleon of-

MORDECAI: Ok, I get the picture. So, what does he look like?

RIDDLE TOAD: I don't know...yet. You must understand, Chronicler, that we are dealing with a very dangerous man. To most he is little more than a name, and he rarely reveals himself – except, of course, to those who can't describe him afterwards.

WINTERS: Hello there! The name's Silas. Silas Winters.

RIDDLE TOAD: Of course.

MORDECAI (FIELD): Um, hello, Mr. Winters. My name's Mordecai Dogwood, I work with the-

WINTERS: I knew I recognized that voice! I listen to your show every week! I love it - we always play it in the bar when it comes on! Keeps the Mildew Boys from melting the floor boards. It is an honor and a privilege to meet you!

MORDECAI (VO): He shook my hand.

Sound of bones crunching.

MORDECAI (VO): It hurt.

MORDECAI (FIELD): I'm glad to help with the...mildew boys?

WINTERS: Please! Come downstairs, have a drink on me! Ever drank Troll Piss?

MORDECAI: Is that an ale?

WINTERS: It's something alright. Follow me, gentlemen!

A door opens. Footsteps on the stair case. The jazz music gets louder.

MORDECAI (VO): Behind the rough wooden counter was a door, and behind the door was a long flight of stairs. The deeper we went, the stronger the musk of beer.

RIDDLE TOAD: F.Y.I., Chronicler, troll urine is a diluted neurotoxin.

MORDECAI: Just so we're clear this recorder is live so/ if there's an issue.

WINTERS: No worries! I could hear the tape spindle in the cassette as soon as you came in. I'm fine with it.

MORDECAI: But as a crime boss.

The sound of footsteps stop.

WINTERS: You know, not a lot of people would say that to my face...

A pause, then riotous laughter. Footsteps resume.

WINTERS: I love it! A completely fresh face. Reminds me of when I first got in the game... Reminds me of when Abigail started up.

MORDECAI: Abigail?

WINTERS: We had this thing... Ah, nevermind.

MORDECAI: I'm actually looking for her.

WINTERS: I know.

MORDECAI: Do you know anything about her? Her disappearance I mean?

WINTERS: Nope.

MORDECAI: Well when was the last time you saw her?

WINTERS: Our relationship wasn't a face to face kind of thing. We were like...pen pals? (*More laughter.*) Like chess. Only more fun and with money.

MORDECAI: Chess?

WINTERS: She'd organize a bust, so I'd find a new route and leave her a proportionate mess to clean up. She was the best opponent I've had. Last time I heard about her, she stopped by my emporium to pick up a truckload of magical weaponry.

MORDECAI: As a bust?

WINTERS: Oh, nonono! She was buying. Buying and then some.

RIDDLE TOAD: As fun as it is to listen to you dance around the subject how much longer do these stairs go?

WINTERS: How much longer do you want?

RIDDLE TOAD: I would like my glass of Troll urine.

WINTERS: It's pronounced piss. But, alright why not?

MORDECAI (VO): And with that the stair case ended. In front of us was a heavy iron door, like for a vault or a submarine. It was open a crack allowing wisps of mist and light to glimmer round the frame. Winters opened it, with a big smile.

Jazzy Lounge Music and jabbering, human or otherwise.

Tape stops.

MORDECAI (VO): So, you know those seedy bars on the waterfront?

NED: Mordecai, this is the Midwest. There is no waterfront.

MORDECAI: Imagine that, right.

NED: What are you?

MORDECAI: Ned. Imagine it. Okay. Imagine those bars on the waterfront but seedier, any light that was on flickering, any cigarette that was lit glowing. Wood paneling, leather everywhere, and looming over it all, above the pool table was the head of a... Hippo-Elephant-Deer thing? I don't know, it was about the size of a whale-

NED: A BEHEMOTH?!

MORDECAI: Probably? Big Deal?

NED: It's in the Bible! It might have made Australia!

MORDECAI: Oh.

MORDECAI: Well now it's mounted in a bar and has marbles for eyes.

NED: Wow.

MORDECAI: I know.

Tape starts.

MORDECAI (VO): Anyway the clientele was mostly human, or at least mostly humanoid. The ones who weren't kept to the corners eyeing everyone else with anger, or hunger, or something. I couldn't read them very well, because they didn't have faces. At the bar sat a group of men in

heavy army fatigues. There were splotches of black across their faces, and from the splotches grew whiskers. Their skin was pale, and shiny with moisture. The Army men looked to us, and raised their glasses. Winters signaled the bartender, who slid a bottle and some glasses our way. Winters nodded to the Army men.

WINTERS: Mildew Boys. You should say hi, cheer em up. They been having a hard time of it since the sphinx went extinct last week.

Clinking glasses, pouring liquid. Steam.

RIDDLE TOAD: Incidentally, a shipment was just interrupted a few leagues from here.

WINTERS: Anything interesting?

RIDDLE TOAD: Previously mentioned sphinx, manta snark, possibly a tusked Boojum. Most curious though -- in the glove compartment was a letter. Addressed to you.

WINTERS: Are you accusing me?

MORDECAI: Nonono, we just-

WINTERS: That's fine, Mordecai. Slander comes with the territory. But I do have one little objection, Riddle Frog.

RIDDLE TOAD: Which is?

WINTERS: A letter with my address on is not incriminating evidence. You'll want to talk to Julia Li - she runs shipments in my name to throw off suspicion. A charming lady regardless.

RIDDLE TOAD: Where can we find Miss Li?

WINTERS: No idea. She hasn't been here in months.

BAM. The door slams open. The music stops.

MORDECAI (VO): The back door slammed open, and a lady in a black ankle-length coat with a white fur collar was framed in the doorway. The bar went silent, and the band ground to a stop. The saxophonist eyed her, and then began playing a slow riff in d minor. She stepped into the bar, withdrew a gold dollar from a pocket, leaned in close to the saxophone player, and let it slide down her fingers. It tumbled into his saxophone case with a soft plunk.

WINTERS: Well look who just made me a liar. Miss Li, Come 'ere Julie Honey!

JULIA: Silas, how are you, dear?

WINTERS: Oh, keeping busy. As are you, I hear! We were just talking about you -- this is Mordecai Dogwood, and -

JULIA: Ah...the last Riddle Toad.

WINTERS: The same. They were hoping to meet-

Smash! A bottle breaks in the background. A sound between mule braying and baby sobbing.

WINTERS: Excuse me gentlemen. I think it's time the Mildew Boys left for the afternoon. Miss Li.

Footsteps walk away.

MORDECAI: So, um, Miss Li, my name's-

JULIA: Mordecai Dogwood, host of the radio show "Magical History of Knox County." Sundays at 7. I know who you are. May I call you Morty?

MORDECAI: Sure! So, Miss Li-

JULIA: Julia, please, Morty darling.

MORDECAI: Right. So we were wondering-

RIDDLE TOAD: We would like to make a purchase.

JULIA: Ah! Anything specific?

MORDECAI: Um...a snow wasset coat?

Tape stops.

NED: Snickers? A coat made out of snickers? A coat made out of my pet?

MORDECAI: It was the first thing I could think of.

NED: You are literally the worst.

Tape starts.

JULIA: Ah, tricky tricky tricky. For someone special?

MORDECAI: Oh, uh, no.

JULIA: Oh, don't be shy, Morty, there's nothing like a snow wasset coat to say: "I care."

MORDECAI: Um...

JULIA: Unfortunately, there aren't enough wassets left to make a coat out of.

MORDECAI: Oh.

JULIA: But, perhaps if you would care to browse?

MORDECAI: Well-

RIDDLE TOAD: He would.

JULIA: Wonderful! Follow me, boys.

MORDECAI (VO): We stood up, Riddle Toad tossed back both our shots, and we followed her out. As we shut the door, I was almost certain I heard a sigh of relief from behind us. Julia turned back onto the staircase, and we descended into the dark.

Footsteps on the staircase.

MORDECAI: Where are we going?

JULIA: My private storeroom.

RIDDLE TOAD: Keeping it with Winters? Ah, I believe I understand. A student and a master.

JULIA: Your estimation is far from accurate.

RIDDLE TOAD: What did you have to do to convince him?

JULIA: Careful, my slippery friend. You have valuable bones. This way, Morty dear.

MORDECAI: Um, so, we're in some sort of wine cellar. It's-wow, it's big.

RIDDLE TOAD: A profound description, Chronicler.

JULIA: Through this side door.

A door creaks.

MORDECAI: Are you sure?

JULIA: Do you want to see the wildlife trade? Through here, boys.

MORDECAI (VO): We stepped through.

MORDECAI (FIELD): It...looks like an old mine shaft.

JULIA: Of course. Where better to hide?

A door creaks and slams.

MORDECAI: What? She locked us in!

RIDDLE TOAD: Cunning shrew!

MORDECAI: Julia? Julia, open the door!

JULIA (through the door): Sorry boys. You wanted to see the trade, and you will. First hand. If you make it out of the mines, feel free to never see me again. Of course, I'm thankful for everything you're doing.

RIDDLE TOAD: Madam, you have just become an endangered species!

JULIA: Oh, and you're entering a high magic zone. Don't stay there too long. Magic is the stuff of life, and you do know what happens when there's *too much* life don't you? Buh-bye darlings!

MORDECAI: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?! COME BACK!

Water drips. It echoes in the cave.

MORDECAI: What now?

RIDDLE TOAD: Forward...and into the abyss. Follow me.

Shuffling footsteps.

MORDECAI: What did she mean? High-magic?

RIDDLE TOAD: Magic exists in life forms. However, as with any form of energy, if you get too much of it, it can change things.

MORDECAI: What, like radiation? Like if we stay in this cave too long, our hair will fall out? We'll get burns?

RIDDLE TOAD: The analogy is correct, however, as she said, magic is the stuff of life. Too much of it and life changes. Gains extra limbs. Additional visual organs. I once met a man whose bones turned inside out.

MORDECAI: What... Ok. We need to get out of here fast.

RIDDLE TOAD: Agreed. Stop!

MORDECAI: But I thought-

Click.

RIDDLE TOAD: Chronicler, if you value your continued existence, take a step backwards.

MORDECAI: What is it?

RIDDLE TOAD: A lesson for the unwary. I'll deal with it.

A pause. A slight shuffling sound - then - BANG. A shotgun blast echoes in the cave.

MORDECAI: She's trying to kill us!

RIDDLE TOAD: Not at all, Chronicler. A 12-gauge round attached to a tripwire. Child's play. If Ms. Li wanted us dead, we already would be.

MORDECAI: Ok, so the only way out is down an abandoned mine shaft, through a high-intensity magical field and past the--

RIDDLE TOAD: Down!

A rending crash. Wood splinters.

MORDECAI: Booby traps?

RIDDLE TOAD: I think of them more as “treasure indicators.” Remember Chronicler, down here, fear can be as dangerous an enemy as the crushing night. Or magical mutants.

MORDECAI (VO): We walked for a long time in the dark, occasionally pausing for Riddle Toad to trigger a particularly nasty trap. Progress was slow -- the tunnel was lit only by occasional veins of glowing fungus. Then the tunnel started turning uphill, which was where we wanted to go.

Footsteps, dripping cave noises.

MORDECAI (FIELD): So...I've been wondering. I don't know if this is wrong to ask, but are you really the last Riddle Toad?

RIDDLE TOAD: Yes.

MORDECAI: I'm sorry.

RIDDLE TOAD: That's alright. Up until a few years ago, there were two of us. My third cousin. Honestly she could be very annoying.

MORDECAI: What happened?

RIDDLE TOAD: I don't know. There were never many of us. Most died because of humans. A few fled from the world after I hatched. The rest of us tried to--- Stop!

MORDECAI: Waaaaah -- back!

RIDDLE TOAD: Disengage, you vermin!

MORDECAI (VO): A flock of small four-winged bats swarmed past us. One hit me in the face, and dropped to the ground. It screamed at me.

BAT (High-speed squeaky backwards speech): What are you, deaf? Watch yourself, yah dern annelid! You'll never make it through this season!

Flapping noises.

MORDECAI (VO): Then it flapped away. The tunnel was quiet again. We stepped through the doorway.

MORDECAI (FIELD): Woah. We've...ok, we've entered a massive cavern. I can't even tell how large it is.

RIDDLE TOAD: ...Fortunately there are ways to break up the pervasive shadows.

MORDECAI: Are you going to do magic?

RIDDLE TOAD: We could, I suppose, but it would take tremendous energy, the correct sigils, and time. Alternatively, you could use this light switch.

Click.

MORDECAI: Ok...woah. This is - it's the biggest cave I've ever seen. It's filled with stacked boxes...cages... The cave itself is bigger than a warehouse, someone has put lights along the roof, and, uh, well the rock formations in the roof are...really strange.

RIDDLE TOAD: Employ that intellect of yours, Chronicler. What structure does it remind you of?

MORDECAI: Well... a spine... vertebrae I mean and from those curved pillars... We're in a rib cage?

RIDDLE TOAD: Precisely! Mr. Winters may have various ethical failings, but the man has style. Where better to serve as a repository for illegal animal products...than inside the decaying ribcage of a dragon?

MORDECAI: Okay, uh, we're inside a dragon.

RIDDLE TOAD: The remains of one rather. That explains the high magical charge...Come, let us see what our friend Mr. Winters has to offer us. Open that crate, there. I can smell something interesting within.

Crack. Wood splinters.

MORDECAI: It's...just sacks of flour.

RIDDLE TOAD: Yes, but that's not the important part. Pull out one of the top sacks.

Clunking sound.

MORDECAI: They look like...branches.

RIDDLE TOAD: Unicorn horns. These belong to the sub-african species.

MORDECAI: Are unicorns legal to hunt?

RIDDLE TOAD: Unicorns are both endangered and sentient, so hunting them is punishable by death in most countries. There were 48 left in the world last year. Apparently, fewer now.

MORDECAI (VO): I looked down at the withered horns, and for the first time felt a real pang. Seeing the lines of boxes and crates, I realized this operation was on a much larger scale than I'd thought. The Riddle Toad hopped down the aisle, checking tags. He stopped at a large glass cage, and examined the contents for a minute. Then he started hopping excitedly.

RIDDLE TOAD: Here! Look!

MORDECAI: What is it?

RIDDLE TOAD: A relic, o Chronicler. Come and see the vestiges of a simpler world.

MORDECA (VO): Someone had taken a large glass tank, maybe 12 feet across, and had covered the floor in a coating of sand. A couple of logs sat in the corner.

MORDECAI (FIELD): I don't see - woah. Um-ok, one of the logs just opened an eye - it's looking at us, it's, ok, it's changing color. I'm looking at...I guess it's a lizard, but it has a few feathers, maybe 6 feet long?

RIDDLE TOAD: Truly we are honored today, Chronicler. Kingdoms have been built on claims of seeing a dragon nymph.

MORDECAI: What? But I thought dragons were...huge.

RIDDLE TOAD: Colossal. This is an infant.

MORDECAI: And they're very rare.

RIDDLE TOAD: Theoretically extinct. You see dragons are not magical creatures, but rather creatures of magic. They exude potent magical fields, thus the magic required to sustain them is colossal. When a dragon gives birth, it buries its single offspring - always one - deep in the ground. The parent then dies, and its magical essence slowly dissolves back into the earth, nurturing the infant. The nymph will wait, for millennia in the deep beneath the hills, suckling on the ley lines until it pupates into godhood.

MORDECAI: Like cicadas.

RIDDLE TOAD: Precisely. Unfortunately, this is no longer their world. Magic used to be in everything -- rocks, trees, the living and the dead. Now there are only a few spots of light, where

you can glimpse the radiance behind the darkened stones. And the creatures of magic have likewise faded - either actively exterminated, or slowly pushed from their home into the freezing, endless night. To beyond the Cabinet. We may well be looking at the very last dragon.

MORDECAI: And they put it in a cage...

RIDDLE TOAD: Of course they did. Whoever sells the poor thing can retire to their own private island. Let's find the door and bring up your car - We can probably fit it in the trunk.

MORDECAI: Wait - are you -

A large metal door latch slams.

WINTERS: Afternoon, boys.

RIDDLE TOAD: A pleasant *apres-midi* to you too, Mr. Winters.

WINTERS: He speaks French too! I love this guy.

MORDECAI: I'm impressed by your collection.

WINTERS: The best in the world.

MORDECAI: Don't you realize how bad this is? These animals are going to go extinct!

WINTERS: That's why they're valuable.

MORDECAI: Don't you care if they die?

WINTERS: Not really. I'll find others. Things live, things die, you sell the dying to feed the living. Who let you in here?

RIDDLE TOAD: Julia Li.

WINTERS: Ah. She's lovely, isn't she? Keeps sending people into my stockpiles - I might just kill her this weekend.

RIDDLE TOAD: That's ambitious of you.

MORDECAI: Well, it was a pleasure to meet you, now if you could just point the way out?

WINTERS: Haha nice try Morty. I can barely see the strings on you. But I'm tired of humoring you.

MORDECAI (VO): He took out a remote control and pressed a button. One of the larger glass cages opened.

Pneumatic hiss.

WINTERS: Meet Terminus.

RIDDLE TOAD: Who's Terminus?

WINTERS: Who WAS Terminus is the question. Afternoon, gentlemen! Tell the angels who sent you!

A metal door slams. An animal snarl echoes in the cave. Claws skitter on concrete.

MORDECAI: Toad!

RIDDLE TOAD: Chronicler, I have a plan. I work out the lock to the back door, you distract it.

MORDECAI: You're using me as bait?

RIDDLE TOAD: Of course. Put wings to your heels!

Hunting howl.

MORDECAI: Woah, jeez. Ok, it's about the size of a car, um, the shadows are melting and oozing around it-

Roar.

MORDECAI: Aaaaah!

Glass smashes. Wood breaks. The animal snarls.

MORDECAI (whispered): Ok, that was too close. Um, it's got between 4 and 8 legs I'd guess, and at least one claw, it's a bit like some sort of scorpion thing, but shadows are dripping off it like oil. I'm hiding in some –

Skittering noise.

MORDECAI: SHEEELVES!

Crates clatter. More glass breaks. The creature snarls.

MORDECAI: Ohmigod, aaaaah! Ha!

A door slams. The creature snarls.

MORDECAI: Ok. Ok. I'm in some sort of closet. I saw a door off on the side. I think it's outside. Um, there's something crunchy underfoot - hang on, cell phone light and – Aaaaaaa! Ok, ok. Ok. Um. Dead ants. Thumb Sized. I hope there aren't any live ones in here. Um, the creature seems to have calmed down-

SMAAAAASH!

MORDECAI: Aaaaah!

MORDECAI (VO): I stared at an 8-inch stinger that had just been thrust through the door. It oozed shadow, which dripped onto the floor and splashed my shoe. My foot went numb.

The creature roars. Clunk. Crash. Wood starts to creak and break.

MORDECAI: Aaaand it's breaking in. Calling for help.

Smashing noises.

NED: What Mordecai?

MORDECAI: Ned! I'm stuck in a closet, and there's some animal outside that wants to break in!
Help!

NED: Uh, okay - what do you want me to do?!

MORDECAI: I don't know? How do you deal with this kind of situation?!

NED: I don't know!

Wood smashes. Claws.

NED: I'm phoning Lumily and Divodit.

MORDECAI: Hurry!

Grunts. Clicks.

NED: Ok. They want to know - can you describe the creature?

MORDECAI: No! Dripping shadows. Lots of legs!

Smash!

MORDECAI: The door's half gone! 10 seconds!

NED: Ok? Ok. It's some sort of magical distortion. A mutation caused by high magical fields. Possibly a spider that was in the wrong place at the wrong time. If it's wrapped in shadow, it might be vulnerable to intense light?

MORDECAI: Could a cell phone work?

NED: Did you get that? Oh. Mordecai, you need something stronger. Like the sun.

MORDECAI: Ned, I'm underground!

Click. Then an eerie quiet. The door creaks open. The animal growls.

MORDECAI: It's in. Ned?

Bang! A metal door opens. The animal shrieks in agony.

MORDECAI (FIELD): Ok, some really powerful light came from...somewhere. It's backed off. Hang on - ha. The toad got the door open. The sun's shining in.

RIDDLE TOAD: A Smith and Weston Octuple digit. Should have taken me less time.

The animal howls.

MORDECAI: It's...oh my god. In the sunlight, the shadows are melting away from the creature - it's like a pale spider thing - no, not enough legs. Now it's standing up, um. It looks...it almost looks human. Its face is... twisted, like a cinnamon roll. I see two glowing red eyes. Fingers like - well, strange lengths. What *is* it?

RIDDLE TOAD: Note the rags hanging from its arms and legs.

MORDECAI: It looks like...maybe it's wearing what was once a mining uniform...oh no. That was a person?

RIDDLE TOAD: You wondered about what too much life would do?

Clicking, grunting, sniffing.

MORDECAI: It's walking backward, it's going back into the shadows, they're moving around it again-

Snarl.

MORDECAI: And it's running away. It's gone.

RIDDLE TOAD: Back to the car, Chronicler. And grab that crate next to you.

MORDECAI: Wait. You are not using my car to transport illegal merchandise.

RIDDLE TOAD: I will not walk away from this empty handed.

MORDECAI: I don't believe you! You are the last of your kind - how can you stoop to that level! You of all people should -

RIDDLE TOAD: I have to survive, Chronicler! Better me making a profit off it than Winters.

MORDECAI: You're awful.

RIDDLE TOAD: Why do you think I'm still alive?! When everyone else I know is dead, why do you think I'm alive? You know *nothing* of what it means to be a Riddle Toad, Mordecai, so do not dare preach to me what I should or should not be!

Tape stops.

MORDECAI (VO): We talked about it, and the Riddle Toad finally agreed to only take one box, and leave the rest for the police. He asked me not to mention it on air, but I think journalistic integrity isn't dead yet.

NED: Ah, you didn't exactly tread with the angels either. Which is why we're doing the recording from the police station.

MORDECAI: Thanks Ned.

NED: Vehicular theft.

MORDECAI: We had to steal one of Winters's trucks to get away. My car mysteriously vanished.

NED: So says every man who lost his car in a parking lot.

MORDECAI: It was gone. Winters probably pushed it into a ditch or buried it or something. So Ned's bailing me out - after letting me sit in here for a few hours to "learn my lesson." And we're having my papers finalized by the lovely Darleen!

DARLEEN: They'll get done when they get done.

MORDECAI: Yes, well, anyway, Ned, while I was risking life and limb searching for Abigail's trail, what were you working on?

NED: Listening.

MORDECAI: To what?

NED: Her call.

MORDECAI: What - on repeat, or -

NED: Don't read anything into it Mordecai! I just know there's something wrong. Some inflection that shouldn't be there, or something. I've done a full inventory, and she took her best tape recorder with her. I also found a couple of interesting notes.

MORDECAI: On what?

NED: Well, when she was investigating the magical wildlife trade, she noted that many of the animals were disappearing or getting...darker. She wondered if it was possibly related to her 'other project.' That was two weeks before she disappeared. Also, a receipt from the emporium.

MORDECAI: For what?

NED: It didn't say. But she was there the last day I saw her.

MORDECAI: Winters did say she stopped by...but I don't know if I believe that she was buying weapons. Ok, well, after the police have seized his wares and locked him up, perhaps we should ask Winters more questions.

DARLEEN: Good luck with that. Word is, after that tip you gave us, Kip led a team and got his bar and his hideout. But he wasn't there.

MORDECAI: He'll be long gone...wait, why was Kip leading the team? I thought he was a park ranger.

DARLEEN: Jack of all trades.

MORDECAI: Of course...Well, um, that's all for today folks. Thanks for listening in, and remember, don't buy animals or animal products without knowing exactly where they come from.

NED: I still can't believe you left the dragon.

MORDECAI: The Mutant was still in there. Better let Lumily and Divodit take care of it.

NED: That's no excuse! I want a dragon, Mordecai!

Static.

