



## Ricardo and the Palaver

or

*Talking with people is new*

<b>Mission title:</b>	<i>Ricardo and the Palaver or Talking with people is new</i>
<b>Mission log:</b>	1-05
<b>Mission Johnson:</b>	Herr Proteus
<b>Mission reward:</b>	
<b>Participants:</b>	Ricardo

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## 1-05: Personal negotiations

Gently insinuating himself into the conversation when dr. Farsight's show-and-tell was done, Ricardo smoothly switched over to German as a courtesy for Herr Schmidt. "I'm afraid we now must discuss remuneration, *mein Herr*." "But of course." Herr Schmidt was the very image of cool, professional competence.

The haggling was swift, almost perfunctory. Despite himself, Ricardo started warming up to Herr Schmidt, and he thought that Herr Schmidt was warming up to him as well. After that "distasteful detail of money" was taken care of, Ricardo was taken by some surprise as Herr Schmidt framed his next question.

"So, Herr Ricardo, I feel I must ask you something personal. It's somewhat of a personal question, so I hope you will forgive me this imposition. How do you feel about the ... lesser... races? Those that were, such as it were, not fortunate enough to be born, shall we say, fully human?" The question startled Ricardo.

It was in one sense a completely unforgivable breach of conduct in these matters. Ricardo prided himself on his professional demeanor when negotiating, and this was anything but. Yet, somehow, he felt a faint resonance with the man, and he started formulating an honest answer almost despite himself. "To be honest, I'm somewhat troubled by them. At least usually. They can be pleasant enough companions, and good for specialized applications such as it were, but in general I find them ... somewhat lacking."

A broad, honest smile spread itself across Herr Schmidt's face. It was somewhat unnerving to see, as if his face wasn't used to such broad and crude displays of emotion. "I cannot begin to tell you how pleased I am to hear that, *Herr Ricardo*." "Just Ricardo, please." "In that case, I insist that you call me Proteus. *Herr Schmidt* is such a ... trite pretense. It is, though not quite a true moniker, truer than *Herr Schmidt*, at least."

The discussion – no, *exchange* of points of view – that followed rang true on many levels for Ricardo. After all, it *was* true that elves were, in general, quite insufferable in their display of their perceived superiority. Both Ricardo and Proteus glanced over at dr. Farsight at that particular shared insight. And it wasn't as if it was feasible or even desirable to eradicate all of the ... lesser ones. They had their uses. They just shouldn't dilute the genetic waters further, that was all.

After a long, honest chat, Proteus presented Ricardo with a magnificent gift that he fetched from his VW van – an antique dagger, more than a hundred years old. "To symbolize our deeper understanding of the true nature of the world," was Proteus' cryptic comment. He left after that. Ricardo and dr. Farsight returned to the car.

The design of the dagger was ... quite distinctive. Ricardo recognized it immediately. A chill went down his spine when he realized what this could mean, who he had hit it off so well with. And what did it say about *himself*?