



A Talk About Magic

or

I spy with my little eye...

Mission title:	<i>A Talk About Magic or I spy with my little eye...</i>
Mission log:	
Mission Johnson:	
Mission reward:	
Participants:	Vince

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1-07: Calling a friend

Vince hurried out of the stairwell to dr. Farsight's apartment. The huge troll, despite appearances, also possessed a keen mind, and *something* was going on. He was also a student of magical theory – again, despite the fact that he was heavily augmented, magic had always fascinated him with what it could and could not do – and something just wasn't adding up here.

The stories he'd read about talked about possessing entities, but that they had to be invited somehow to do so. Though there was the occasional rumor about free spirits and great form spirits that could enter a person without that person's permission, and then control that person like some demented puppeteer.

Vince had never, ever heard about anything that seemed to spread like a sort of disease, however. Given that [VITAS](#) was hard to guard against in all its varieties, and *that* was as far as he knew a non-magical disease ... well, it was hard to argue with billions of dead. And if this was a *magical* disease to boot... The huge troll had decided that he was in way over his horned head. As the old street proverb said – [when the going gets tough](#), the tough go shopping. Or, as in this case, hiring.

He pulled out his trusty pocket secretary and flipped it open as he strode down the street to the waiting robocab. Getting in, he dialed a number from memory. It was the fixer, Mario's number. By some happy coincidence, Mario picked up almost immediately.

"It's Vince." Vince's surprisingly high-pitched voice was somewhat at odds with his hulking form. "I need to hire a specialist for a problem that I have. It's a non-combat problem, but it requires someone who is especially adept at reading auras, preferably while being in full astral form. I'm not made out of nuyen, but I'm willing to pay well for a specialist with exceptional abilities."

"Well, I've got two off the cuff that I might be able to facilitate." When Mario heard it was Vince, he dropped his usual faux-Italian plumber impersonation. "However, I don't have regular contact with either one of the two – I can only facilitate initial contact." "That is acceptable." Vince's flat voice brooked no objection.

"Very well. One is a residing professor in thaumaturgy and aura reading at Seattle University. The other one is a bit of an ... eccentric." "I'll take the professor," Vince said emphatically. "I'll send you the details by encrypted message, attached to my usual brokering fee." Vince ended the call. A few seconds later, the text message and fee request was received. Authorizing the fee, Vince opened the message. *Erich von Humperholtz*. Some contact information was given as well – but no image.

As the robocab pulled away, Vince dialed the given contact number. He was promptly transferred to some secretary. The professor would be available in about an hour. Vince hoped that would be soon enough. This particular running scene had been going to drek with a frightening regularity.



1-07: The professor ... is intrigued

At the appointed hour, Vince's pocket secretary gave a quiet beep. Stuffing his purchases into the robocab – it was amazing how much bulk armor had, even when it was fairly concealable stuff, and when he added the other items to that... well, he was happy he hadn't released the robocab, though it was starting to getting somewhat expensive.

As he sat down in the robocab, he turned on the privacy filters to filter the sounds from his location, and called the good professor, Erich von Humperholtz. Audio only. In the matter of seconds, the call was picked up, with full video. A small figure stood next to a rather large desk. The figure had a very prominent, pointed nose, large ears – also pointed, and was barefoot.

Continuing the trend, the feet were very large and somewhat pointed. An incongruous, small, red hat with a jaunty tassel was planted at a rakish angle on the goblin's completely bald head. The goblin wore a pair of strange glasses as well, the wide strap warring with the fez over available space. A spectacular specimen of a mutton chop rounded out the general appearance.



With a wide grin, the goblin bowed to the camera. "Hello. You came recommended from my ... shall we say, friend? Mr Manolo. I was under the impression that you had some problems that my ... unique talents? Could help you resolve."

"Yeah, I think so too. First, however, I feel compelled to ask – why does magic manifest as it does? Why do some people do their magic one way, and does it ever fail, in a way?"

The goblin lit up at Vince's question. Waving his hands, interfacing with what was obviously a walk-in holographic-semihaptic suite, the little goblin almost started a little dance while he lectured excitedly, only occasionally lapsing into jabbering too fast for Vince to understand.

"That's actually a very interesting question, I must say! Hmm... I should recommend that as a thesis subject for the next unfortunatedoctoratethat comes along? Obviously, I can only present



my own viewpoint, as a – let's call it a shaman for simple reasons – and in my case, I couldn't choose the place of my ... shall we say, epiphany? Better than I did. Although I was vacationing in Egypt at the time. So there I was, and Ptah, Protector of the Primordial Mound? Decided to talk to me for the first time. Yes.



Of course, I was somewhat lucky. In Egypt, those called to the Ancient Ways usually face ... shall we say, hardship? Because Egypt is an Islamic democracy, you see, and although moderate, the Muslim Mage can sometimes be ostracized and even killed by fundamentalists, and that is very bad."

Pausing, as if to check whether Vince was still paying attention, Vince's quiet "yes, do go on" was all that was necessary to trigger the professor to start lecturing again.

"One could say that it is obvious ... if that is a good word for magic? That the preconceived notions of the individual is at play when the subject is ... shall we say, Awakened? Though the location itself can also be a factor, perhaps particularly when manifesting in a shamanic tradition. Though my kinship with the great Ptah, Protector of the Primordial Mound, is probably different than the kinship that a ... shall we say, shaman that follows Coyote? Follows the path, at least. We might both want to protect this Sixth World that we live in, but ...

Does the totem call the shaman, or does the shaman call the totem? I think it might be six of one, half a dozen of the other – but the self, the ego, one's own idea of oneself obviously does matter.



Though rare, there are the unfortunate individuals that seem to be lying to themselves, and denying their ... shall we say, true nature? And therein lies great tragedy. Yes. Great tragedy indeed. There might be suicide, there might be harming of one's self, there may be uncontrolled spirits – but indeed is not death by a conjured spirit a sort of suicide?

I would tend to think so, as one obviously needs to control oneself before one can interface with the helping servants of the Primordial Mound. It is fascinating, though. And a very good question indeed.”

Somewhat shell shocked by the constant barrage of words and dizzying array of accompanying visuals with graphs, animations, some video – and in at least one instance, a hellhound exploding, Vince tried to refocus himself.

“Yes. Umm... Indeed. Thank you for your very informative answer, professor. Now, I must ask you another question, and the real reason why I contacted you. I have reason to believe that some of my ... associates may be controlled by what I think might be some form of magical infection or effect.

I would then want you to assense them or otherwise do whatever you think best in order to examine this effect – and given the somewhat volatile nature of the associates and their propensity for violence, I think it best to do this while fully astral.

I must point out that my associates are two physical adepts – but I think you'll need to check out a hermetic tradition dwarf as well. I think the physical adepts are able to assense the astral plane, though I do not think they are dual beings. So I would urge some caution, though I think the risk of a confrontation when the assensing is done astrally is minimal.” Vince did his best to clearly and professionally delineate the nature of the task that he wanted the goblin to undertake.

The troll didn't really think that anyone but Jinx and Schneider were infected so far, but better safe than sorry. If you weren't paranoid in the shadows, you weren't long for this sixth world. Heck, he wanted a second opinion on his own aura too, faint though it might be – or so he had been told. Repeatedly. And once by some wizkid girl which then puked and passed out.

The goblin pondered the troll's statement for a moment. “I am ... shall we say, intrigued? By this. I have a location in Tacoma that may be of use in this endeavor. It was originally enchanted by me to allow me to study ... shall we say, unusual animals? Yes. These animals usually were dual natured beasts, and would ... shall we say, react violently? To any perceived metahuman contact. I camouflaged the observation enchantment under some tile, both to assuage the dual natured beasts and to make it easier to clean the detritus after the experiments were concluded.

If you were to give me a call about five minutes before you enter the place at a minimum, I should be able to give this a shot. There's a pass code, of course, and it is obviously the light



speed in a vacuum. 299 792 458. I know, it is a trivial code, but my students had to be able to remember it.” Vince discreetly made a note of the code on his trusty pocket secretary.

“Umm... And another thing, professor. If there’s any security cameras or something there, I would recommend them being turned off. As I said, I believe my associates are in a somewhat volatile state of mind, and I would prefer to antagonize them as little as possible while they’re being assensed.”

“Good call, young man, good call. Obviously, agitated subjects can be more difficult to read in the sense that their ... shall we say, greater emotional amplitude? Can mask more subtle influences in their auras. I shall turn them off, yes, I shall. MMMmmmmm...”

The goblin nodded to himself. Almost as a stray thought, he did a very particular sequence of moves, and a fairly sparse blueprint appeared in the air next to the goblin. Touching eight glowing globes in sequence, they all dimmed. The only globe left glowing was one apparently positioned next to the entrance of the building.

The goblin looked at the camera with a piercing stare. “I look forward to this. You have ... intrigued me immensely, and I will do my utmost. But, I will not work for free. My talent comes with a price, and I am obviously worth that price. I will contact you after the assensing is done, with my report. Remember to give me some time to ready myself before the subjects enter the tiled observation circle.” Rather abruptly, the goblin cut the feed with a sharp gesture.

How deep the rabbit hole went, indeed. Vince put away his pocket secretary. The robocab came to a halt outside dr. Farsight’s apartment. With a sigh, the troll paid the significant fare, gathered up his shopping, and went up to the apartment. Taking a deep breath before he entered the door, he felt a twinge of worry. This wasn’t betrayal, not exactly, but he felt like he should make up for it somehow – later on.

Setting his face firmly, he did decide that nothing of this would’ve been warranted if there indeed *hadn’t* been any funny business going on. As it was, he had to watch out for himself first and foremost. Mind control wasn’t a pretty thing, and if it was something sinister here, better to root it out with overwhelming firepower than to take any chances. He punched the code for the door, and opened it while balancing the stack of shopping on one hand.

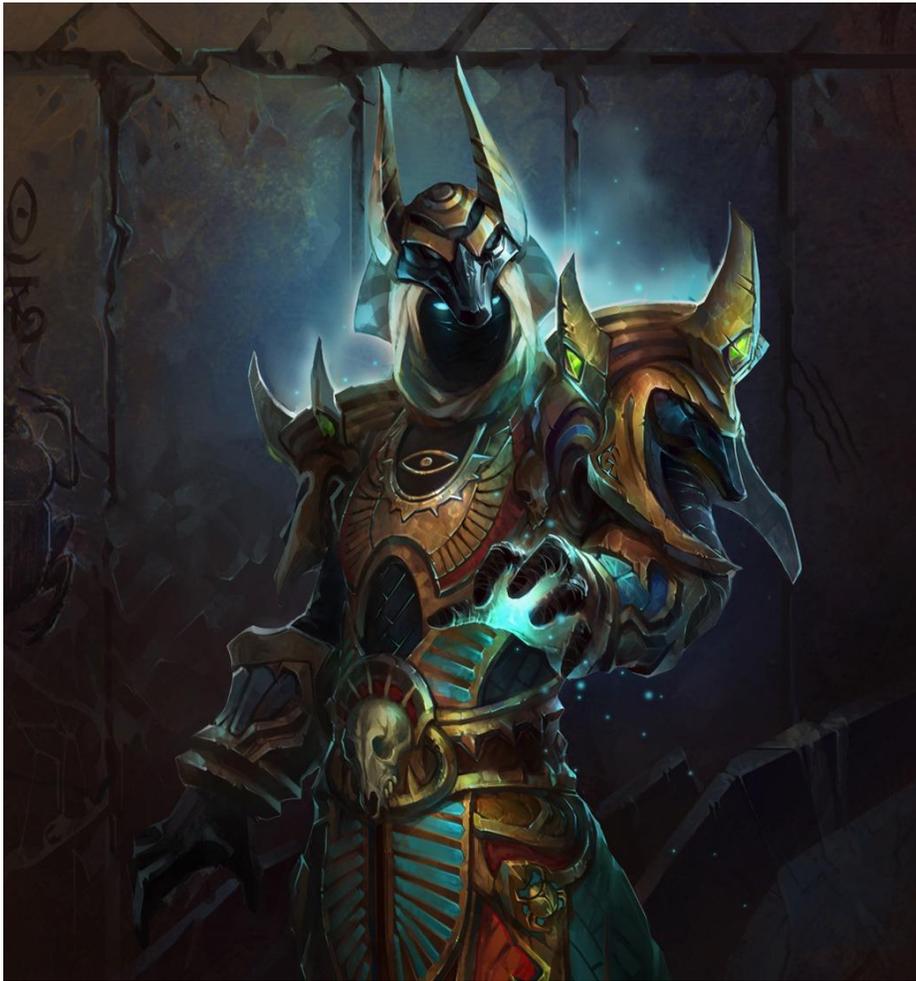




1-07: The professor reports

Vince's pocket secretary chirped. Someone had left a video message for him. With some trepidation, and a furtive glance around him to make sure that he was as alone as he could be, he opened the pocket secretary. As expected, the video message was from the professor, Erich von Humperholtz. Egyptian mage of Ptah – and goblin with a propensity for funny headwear.

The huge troll carefully plugged the pocket secretary's data cable to his datajack. In this particular instance, he wanted to guard against any snooping ears as well as eyes as well as he could. He hit play on the pocket secretary, and the familiar smartlink icon dissolved, replaced by the now familiar goblin's face.



Gone was the slightly humorous and weirdly charming but *very* eccentric professor. In his place was a diminutive person clad in the full ceremonial regalia of an ancient, Egyptian priest. Even the voice of the goblin had changed – taken a more sonorous timbre, perhaps. None of the earlier voice mannerisms were apparent. There was a time for play and a time for business, it seemed, and the time for play was over. In a chanting voice, the professor told – no, *intoned* his report.



"I am kheri heb. I am the guardian of the primordial mound. I was given the sacred task of assensing your associates. I have done so. The results are troubling. I believe that this may develop over time to a threat of the primordial mound. If this happens, I will take steps to protect my sacred charge.

My proxy was at the place, and conversed with one of the stricken ones. That stricken one did not enter my circle of observation. The persons that entered the circle of observation were: One male troll with an aura damaged by the sacrilege of cyberware and bioware. One male elven physical adept of the martial way, studying projectile weapons. One stricken male dwarf hermetic mage of Irish ancestry. One stricken woman physical adept of mixed ancestry.

The sickness they were stricken with was of their own choosing – a pact with an outside influence. They may be contagious in the sense that the sickness seems to facilitate the opportunity to make a pact with this outside influence. The sickness augments their aura and grants them unnatural abilities.

I believe that they may all project a flame of [Apep](#), the [Enemy of Ra](#), Serpent from the Nile, Evil Lizard. I believe that the physical adepts may perceive that which cannot be seen, the true sight, the sight of the world, through the heretic grace of Apep, fallen one. I believe that the hermetic mage has the swiftness of Apep, the striking crocodile. I also believe that they may consume the flesh of Apep, undying one, to gain life from their own death, to feed on themselves.

I believe that they have struck a bargain with Apep, the once dead but now living false god of the sun. I believe that the presence of Apep is that of a snake dismembered but with the segments still living. I believe that they may spread this taint of Apep, attacker of the solar barque, defiler of the natural order of things, like a snake feeding on itself.

I believe that they have entered this heinous pact of their own will, unforced and uncoerced, except kept in the dark of Apep by their own hunger for power.

Apep is chaos personified, bringer of darkness, enemy of light, world encircler. Apep is an evil god, defiler of the primordial mound, living and undead sacrilege. However, the bargain was entered willingly. One cannot be forced into light when one has chosen darkness. So while not benign, this is not an attack on the primordial mound. *Yet.*

I observe. I do the sacred rites. I am builder, constructor. I am Ptah. I am also guardian of the primordial mound. I will destroy that which threatens world order. I observe. I guard. I *wait.*"

The message ended abruptly. Vince closed the pocket secretary, unplugging the data cable from his datajack. He frowned in thought. Was this better or worse than not knowing? He wasn't sure. But now he knew. *Now what?*