



Down Time

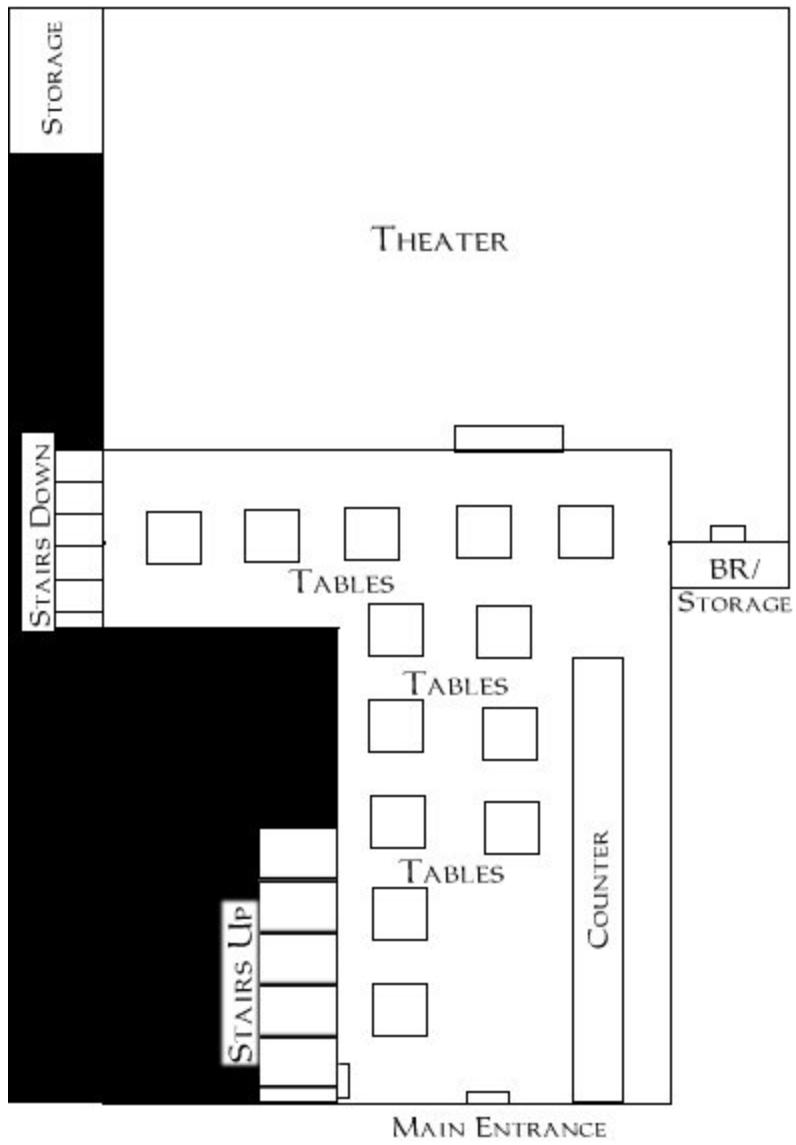
As with every good show, things happen off screen and between episodes. Our characters recently underwent their first extended period of down time (Mid-season re-runs, if you will). Here's some background on things that have happened during down time.

The Cast has all been contacted by Dana Green, who intends to put her arcane knowledge and resources to better use than a private library. She has decided to open up a New Age bookstore and "curio" shop, and needs employees. As wealthy as she is, she has no worry about losing money; this is an expensive hobby for her and she feels that she can do some good in the process. Thus, she's offered the lot of them jobs (except Drake, who is still something of an outsider to the group; presumably Cyan would refuse as she easily makes as much money dancing) that pay pretty well (in the area of 30 grand a year). She has pulled strings and used tax loopholes to write off the majority of your salaries, so long as certain charities receive regular donations (she is extremely capable at managing her inheritance, and it's all 100% legal).

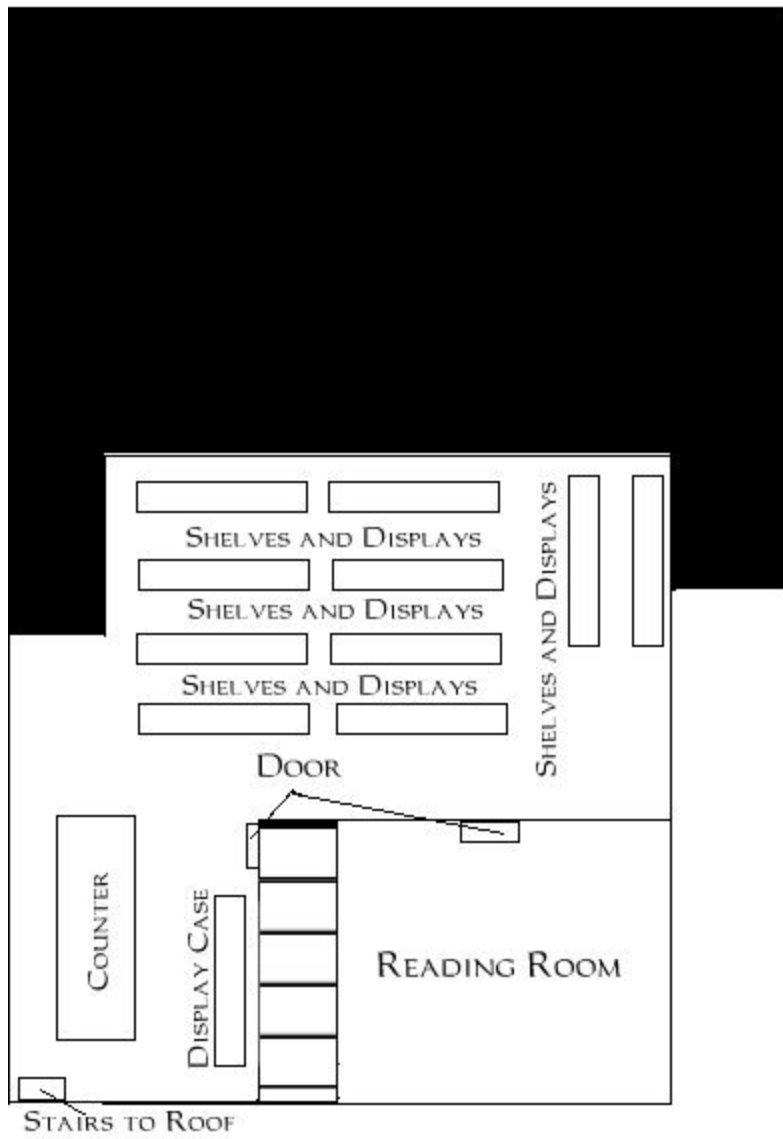
There is direct sewer access to the Oakland tunnel system underneath the shop.

- Kat has been offered a job as a clerk (making her quite possibly the wealthiest 17 year old in Pittsburgh with her own income)
- Walter and Jon have been offered jobs as security and maintenance (she rightly presumes that her valuable ancient texts will need protecting)
- Anita has been offered a minority partnership in the store (really, not much more than a glorified management position) as well as an office from which to run her P.I. agency.
- Cyan (if she so chooses to accept) is also offered a job as a clerk and in a P.R. capacity (let's face it; she has the looks).

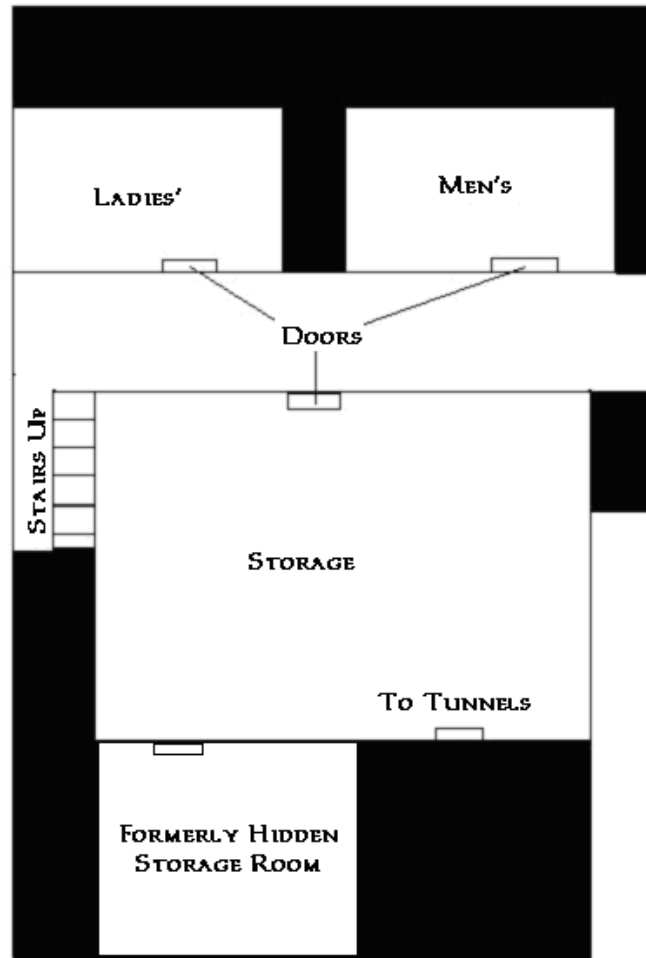
The shop will be opened in the old King's Court Theater building on Forbes Avenue, in Oakland, and will be called *The Hive Arcana*, after the former business, the Beehive Coffee House. Dana has made a lucrative offer to Oakland Realty and purchased the building outright, which will cut down on her overhead a great deal. The downstairs portion of the store will be a cafe (she will knock out the wall at the back and expand the cafe portion slightly into where the movie theater was, then have a new wall constructed to separate the back room, which during the day and after hours will be a private room for the group of you to meet, lounge, plot, etc. and in the evenings will be used to host live musical acts.) The upstairs will be the bookstore, shop, and a plush reading area.



Hive Arcana, Ground Floor



Hive Arcana, Upper Floor



Hive Arcana, Basement

East Information

ANITA'S INFORMATION

Anita has received a call from Rupert Giles informing her of exactly what's going on in Sunnydale and with the Slayer line. He's incredibly relieved to hear that she survived the destruction of the Watchers' Council, and that she and Kat are well. He tells her that she and Kat are better suited staying exactly where they are, hopefully beneath the radar of the First. If they fail in California, Kat is the last link to the Slayer line, and Giles feels that it's best if she is removed from the central conflict for that reason. He's also stunned to learn of the existence of a Hellmouth in Pittsburgh. Stunned, mind you, but not surprised, given the amounts of Essence that tend to follow major rivers and lakes, and given that Pittsburgh has 3 (4, you correct him) that meet at one point. Due to the rather severe nature of their own crises, he isn't able to offer a great deal of help in your situation, but between Dana's library and his, this is what you come up with about the Djinn:

The Djinn is one of the Old Ones (known to those in the loop as the Mad Gods) who roamed the world when Demons ruled the Earth as a Hell Dimension. It is also one of the few who managed to retain a foothold in the world when the rest of the demons were driven out. For centuries it took root in the world of man, granting perversions of wishes and driving souls mad as its power grew. There are thousands of stories about the Djinn throughout history, some of which have even been perverted into Children's tales (Aladdin, anyone?) The Djinn during its reign of terror has been like a vengeance demon without a pattern or restriction. It grants wishes with impunity, and isn't at all tempered by the spirit of the wish; all it wants is to drive humans mad, and devour their souls. As it does so, it grows more and more powerful, seeking to amass enough power to tear down the barriers between Earth and the Hell Dimensions, and restore the world to the way it was those hundreds of thousands of years ago...a Hell Dimension. The Djinn was banished hundreds of years ago, trapped within the Hellmouth by an incredibly unusual alliance formed of a coven of Wicce, Rosicrucians, and Totem Warriors. Somehow, it has regained a foothold on our reality and is once again building its power.

What it's trying to do is akin to hitting the Hellmouth with the mystical equivalent of a 90-megaton nuclear warhead. Not just open it, but completely blow the lid off of it, tearing a massive hole in reality. This is easily as bad as what would've happened had Glory succeeded in her plan to break the barriers of the dimensions, and once the doors are fully opened, only the soul of a Slayer can close them.

Now the real problems come to light. Unfortunately, this isn't one of those situations where "only once every 500 years, when the planets are right and the stars...blah, blah, blah." No, there are literally hundreds of ways that the Djinn's return could come about. Cults, spells gone awry, the use of other demons, raw power...there's no way to know how it's going to happen, and until the group figures that out, or figures out how to seal that Hellmouth, but good, they've got to stop it until its big push happens, then worry about finding a way to keep it contained before Anita has to sacrifice her Slayer.

WALTER'S INFORMATION

In his apartment at one point, the demon in his closet begins thrashing around, acting positively wild, banging its head off of the walls and door and generally making a ruckus. Walter goes to silence him with his usual technique of blunt trauma to the head, but the feral look in the demon's eyes gives even Walter pause.

"It's coming," the demon says, frothing at the mouth. "It's coming."

"What's coming?"

"The Big Day. The Grand Opening. Souls on Clearence. Everyone Must Go!"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Big Day!! Everyone Must Go!!! He told me! I WISHED IT!"

Before Walter can react, the thing springs new arms and legs, massively powerful, and springs at him. It knocks him across the room, tearing him up pretty good in the process, then bounds to the window. It turns, briefly, and looks him straight in the eye.

"From beneath you, it devours, yes...but from outside you, *It* arises. And the Slayer will die."

And it crashes through the window, plummets to the street below. There are screams, but by the time Walter drags himself to the window, it's nowhere in sight.

JONATHAN'S INFORMATION

Jonathan is working the Upstage one night, as usual. It's a fairly quiet night, and none of the Gang has been by. Probably, he figures, helping Dana with the pre-opening renovations on the store. He knows she's planning a big concert for the grand opening. Word is she's even booked the band Disturbed to play a concert in the theater that night. Given all that, it's not entirely surprising not to see Kat, Walter, or Anita, and Cyan's been getting paid some big bucks to dance a few extra shifts. She's hinted there might be a Playboy photo spread upcoming that she's working on. Drake Jonathan could honestly care less about, although it worries Jon that Drake seems so attached to Kat and Anita. In any case, Jonathan figures he can swing by the Hive Arcana after work and see if anyone's around.

He steps out into the alley for a cigar at one point in time, and suddenly there's a huge commotion at the far end of the alley. Soon a figure comes into sight, bloodied and beaten, towards Jonathan. There's a demon of some sort following the figure. Without thinking twice, Jonathan draws and fires once, twice, three times...a fourth time...a fifth...a sixth...finally the demon falls, hissing and sputtering, and melts into a puddle of greenish goo. The figure, a muscular black man in an army green tank top and BDU pants, collapses into Jonathan's arms, gasping for air. Jon looks down at the man, and his heart leaps into his throat. He suddenly can't breathe.

He knows this man.

It's Alan Parker, one of his unit mates from their failed mission to Pittsburgh. Jonathan had thought them all dead, although truth be told the bodies were too mutilated to tell for certain. And now, it looks like Alan isn't long for this world.

"Jon," he gasps, "Thought you...were...dead."

"Yeah, well, I'm not, and neither are you. But you will be if I don't get you some help."

"No...hospital...no...time."

"Alan, you've got broken ribs. You're coughing up blood. I'm not a doctor, but you could have a punctured lung."

"Dying," Alan coughs. "You've got to stop them!"

"Stop who?"

"The ones that did this to us. Raising...demon...Aztec cult...Find them...clear our names!"

"Where are they, Alan? I've got friends. We can..."

"No. No outsiders. Swear it!"

"You have my word."

"Have..name...only. Cult of Wishes. Set you up. Thought I was dead..." Suddenly, Alan grabs Jon by the shirt and holds with a death grip. His eyes widen, and he says, totally clearly. "He set you up, John. He sold us out and set you up for a patsy. They wanted our souls. But they didn't get mine, dammit. They didn't get mine. Find them. Avenge me. Avenge all of us. Clear your name. But just you. No civilians. You promised!"

And he dies.

KAT'S INFORMATION

Since the gang has gained access to an occult library, Anita has determined it's time to up Kat's arcane studies. So she's been spending a lot of time with her nose buried in a book. Fun...not. Sandra seems to think it's pretty cool, but Kat has always been more into Marilyn Manson's Antichrist Superstar than Toben's Spirit Guide. Still, she has to admit that some of the stuff she's picking up could be helpful down the line.

Through the course of her studies, Kat comes across several things pertinent to the situation at hand, some useful and some curious, and one very disturbing account.

She finds mentions of a figure called The Black Man, or The Black Magician, named so because he always appears swathed from head to toe in black robes, his face obscured. He is associated with an ancient Aztec god known as Tezcatlipoca. Tezcatlipoca was known as the Shadow, the Mirror That Smokes, and the One Always at the Shoulder. He was a trickster, bringer of chaos, and a patron of magicians and war. He was also a god of wealth and power, whose favors could only be won by those who could face the terror of his true visage and retain their sanity. All others who called upon him were devoured. He was the son of the Earth Goddess Tonacacihuatl, who granted the wishes and desires of men and women. It seems that even though the Aztecs have been extinct for thousands of years, worship of Tezcatlipoca has endured through small cults and sects down through the ages. The most recent one in mention was known as the Cult of Wishes and was in operation in the 1800's in Europe, with sects popping up in the New World, in New Orleans and Massachusetts. It is rumored that all the way up into the 1930's there were sightings of The Black Man throughout the world; he was rumored to be a physical manifestation of the god itself, and took great pleasure in corrupting mankind and devouring their souls. It's unclear what exactly happened, but sometime in the 40's there was some sort of planetary alignment and conjunction of the stars, and the Black Magician hasn't been seen since.

Strangely, Kat finds this information in a book that Jonathan was looking at and left on the table. He left in a hurry shortly after she came into the room, and didn't say much.

After marking that particular passage, Kat moves on to some other books, namely the more interesting vampire tales of medieval Europe. She finds mentions of the legendary Angelus, obviously, but what disturbs her the most is an account of another vampire whose face, illustrated in a print of a 16th-century portrait, is so familiar that for a minute she has to stop and think to keep her heart beating. The vampire's name? Draco, and yes, it's our Drake.

It seems that Draco was a minor nobleman in the 1500's in Great Britain. In the early-1500's he was sired and spent the next 75 years in typical but not noteworthy vampire activities, before in the late 1500's or early 1600's he moved to central Europe, where he assumed the title of Voivod (warlord) and amassed a small army of both human and demonic (vampire) followers. They swept west again, their activities coinciding with the Inquisition, and decimated hundreds of small towns and villages, along with several places of power for the Inquisition. The records of his activities read like a who's who of mass murder, and some of the accounts are so base and bloody that it makes you physically ill to read them. It seems that near the end of the Inquisition, the Templars caught on to Draco's activities and began slowly whittling away at his followers, working their way up the food chain. There are mentions of a Slayer making contact with Draco at some point during that period, but no record of the outcome. Whatever happened, very shortly thereafter, Draco utterly vanished from sight.

DRAKE'S INFORMATION

Word is out that there's a Slayer in town. It seems that a demon who had his arms and legs chopped off and was being kept in a closet by a friend of hers suddenly sprouted new arms and legs (massive ones) and made a getaway. He's been spreading the word about her, though nobody knows what she looks like, yet. Apparently this demon heard a voice that promised him power beyond his wildest imaginings and the granting of any wish in his heart, in return for allegiance.

The demon has, apparently, gone quite batty. He's been stealing babies in the middle of the night and eating their brains. A party of vampires has actually gone out to take care of him, because the underworld doesn't need that kind of spotlight shone upon it.

Speaking of Vampires, lately they've been migrating en masse to Los Angeles due to an unusual blotting out of the sun. Unfortunately, the sun came back about a week ago and thousands of undead were instantly incinerated.

Everyone can feel that there's something big in the air. There are whisperings that the Black Magician has been seen in town, and Drake has no desire to run into him. Drake ran into him once, a few centuries back, and the Black Man scared the bejesus out of him. Drake had the distinct impression that if the Black Magician wanted to, he could will Drake to dust. Drake has seen a lot of vampires and demons in his day, but has never known chaos and blackness like what emanated from beneath the shadows of those black robes. And apparently the Black Magician is only the harbinger of what's to come, a physical manifestation of the true entity that seeks to arise.

Drake has a pretty good idea of what exactly the Djinn is, and it's far from something he wants to see unleashed. As Spike put it, "I like it here. You've got millions of people walking around like Happy Meals with legs," and the unleashing of an Old One in all its power and glory would put a quick end to human life on Earth.

It gets worse. There are whisperings of a cult dedicated to the ancient god Tezcatlipoca in town, but nobody seems to know who they are or where they work. At least, nobody Drake has talked to, yet. Tezcatlipoca is also the closest entity to the Djinn that Drake has come across.

CYAN'S INFORMATION

Cyan is at Bare Elegance, dancing one evening, and is satisfied to see a larger crowd than usual. After her set, she changes clothes (amazed at how much safer she feels now that she can legally strap a gun to her thigh) and comes out to grab a club soda at the bar. As usual, the men in the club forget that strippers have ears, and a few guys at the end of the bar don't bother to quiet their conversation as she takes a seat near them. They're very drunk, and their lips flow pretty freely.

The gist of it is this: they're members of some cult worshipping an ancient Aztec god with a wierd name that sounds like "the Cat's Copa" or something. They also refer to him as the Shadow and the Smoky Mirror. Now talk of cults in this city isn't incredibly unusual, but what does catch her attention is that they start talking about having all of their wishes granted, and gaining power beyond belief. They also mention the sacrificing of souls to their god, and there is talk about a platoon of "army assholes" that they sold out to get their souls. For some reason that sparks a thought of Jonathan--Cyan does know that he was once in the military, and doesn't like to talk about his days in the service. It's also come out recently that he was formerly in the Initiative, a black ops branch of the military dedicated to battling the supernatural. The kicker is this: they start talking about their temple being beneath an old warehouse out past the Strip District.

Anita, Kat, Walter, and Dana have been very busy lately trying to get the Hive Arcana ready for its grand opening (Dana has booked the band Disturbed to play a concert that night), and they did ask Cyan as a favor to help them out with the hostessing duties that evening, so she, too, has been occupied. Besides that, strolling into an evil cult's temple isn't her idea of fun, or the kind of thing she thinks she's really expected to handle. Jonathan, on the other hand, hasn't been involved very much with the opening of the store, so he might be free to check it out.