

MASTERS OF THE DARK REALM

by
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MASTERS OF THE DARK REALM

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MASTERS OF THE DARK REALM

For Mom

MASTERS OF THE DARK REALM

Masters of the Dark Realm was the 2nd place winner of the Las Vegas Little Theatre's New Work Competition 2018.

Masters of the Dark Realm opened at The Actors Workout Studio, North Hollywood, CA, on June 21st, 2019 with the following cast:

Joel.....Noah Kaplan

Nicole.....Rachel Christianson

Frank.....Kerry Kazmierowicztrimm

Brett.....Brett Gustafson

Judy.....Daisy Donohue

Directed by Corey Chappell

Produced by Sebastian Munoz and Force of Nature Productions

MASTERS OF THE DARK REALM

CAST: 2 Women, 3 Men

JOEL 30s, geek, with a drop of sophistication. He is the game master, and wizard, in his group's Masters of the Dark Realm Game. Close to their father figure, he is more of a big brother figure.

NICOLE 30s, his wife, sweet and adorable. The mother of the group. Often comes close to losing patience with her friends, but usually finds a way to diffuse the situation. She plays a magical elf in the game.

FRANK 30s, their friend, a stickler for the rules. He is a troll in the game.

JUDY 30s, another friend, quite the opposite of Nicole's mothering nature, tough, no-nonsense and short tempered at times. Probably because she's not yet comfortable in her own skin. She is a warrior in the game.

BRETT 30s, another friend, a stereotypical stoner. He is a wood sprite in the game.

TIME: A recent winter.

PLACE: Joel and Nicole's game room in their New England home.

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ACT 1 SCENE 1

The stage is dark and covered in mist/fog. Sound effects of a forest with a hint of magic. Mystical music or atmosphere. JOEL, dressed in a poor man's wizard costume, enters. Though it looks like something thrown together from discarded items around the house, this wizard will act as if he's the real deal. He stares at a point beyond the audience.

JOEL. Behold! The Castle of Trog. (*NICOLE enters. She is dressed in something like an old prom dress or bridesmaid's gown. A plastic tiara in her hair. She is the character of a faerie and speaks in a whispery voice.*)

NICOLE. Our long quest is almost at an end. (*JUDY enters, limping. She is dressed in plastic armor and carries a plastic Halloween ax. In reality, she's slightly "rough around the edges". In character she's a gruff warrior.*)

JUDY. No thanks to you guys. I fought that giant spider alone. It almost killed me.

NICOLE. We were trapped in its web.

JOEL. I'll do my best to protect you in the castle. (*FRANK enters. He is the most serious of the group. His character is a troll. Though his costume is not professional, it should feel accurate, especially the weapons.*)

FRANK. You need to protect us all, wizard.

NICOLE. He always does.

JUDY. Not from giant spiders.

NICOLE. It stung him before he could cast a spell.

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FRANK. If I were a wizard-

JOEL. *(Cutting him off.)* You're not. *(BRETT enters. His characters is a wood sprite and he portrays it by wearing as little clothing as possible. He is least in character, probably because he's a stoner.)*

BRETT. Are we at the castle yet, guys?

JOEL. We just arrived.

FRANK. Which you'd have known if you were here.

BRETT. Sorry, dude, I needed a puff. We going inside? *(Brett starts forward, almost as if he's going to walk off stage. Joel reaches out and grabs him.)*

JOEL. The door is impassable.

BRETT. Is it, like, made of wood. I could talk to it with my powers.

FRANK. What could a wood sprite possibly say to a door?

BRETT. *(Laughs.)* Open up, man! *(Nicole laughs politely, but the others are not amused, Frank least of all.)*

JOEL. It's steel.

FRANK. Look for a secret lever. *(Frank pats downs an invisible door before him.)*

JOEL. Nothing.

JUDY. I try my ax. *(Judy raises her ax. Frank grabs it before she can swing.)*

FRANK. You have to roll for force.

JUDY. I know. *(Lights rise up stage. There we find a card table and chairs are set up. On the table is an elaborate board game with cards, dice, tokens and anything else to give the feeling of a long, complicated game. There are also various rule and character books spread around the table and floor. This is Joel and Nicole's game room on the top floor of their New England home. One by one the five of them will move to take positions at the table. With the exception of breaking for game rules, they will remain in character. Judy picks up a die and rolls.)*

JUDY. Five.

JOEL. The door is magically sealed, your hit ricochets through your body. Lose five health points.

JUDY. Fuck.

BRETT. Hey, Mr. Wizard man, can't you break the magical spell?

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FRANK. It's Nicole's turn.

NICOLE. Pick the lock.

JOEL. The door is magically protected from lock picking.

FRANK. She still has to roll.

JOEL. But- *(Nicole looks to Joel. They both know it's pointless and do it anyhow.)*

NICOLE. Eleven.

JOEL. The door is magically protected from lock picking.

NICOLE. Let's hope you can open it with a spell.

FRANK. Of course he can. He wrote the game.

JOEL. I adapted it. I'd never change it to favor my character.

FRANK. You shouldn't be playing a character. You're the Game Master.

JUDY. Not this again...

BRETT. Chill out, dude.

FRANK. I should Master the next game. *(Joel and Nicole share a look.)*

JUDY. No. Last time we let you Master, you made the game so hard we all died.

FRANK. I played by the rules, unlike Joel.

BRETT. Dude, relax, it's only a game.

FRANK. Which should be played correctly.

NICOLE. Roll Joel.

JOEL. I need a six or higher to break the spell. *(Rolls a die.)* Seven. *(SFX representing the breaking of a spell. Judy, Nicole and Brett cheer.)*

BRETT. *(In character.)* Into the castle to defeat Trog!

FRANK. We still have to open the door.

BRETT. We just did that, young troll.

FRANK. We broke the spell, but didn't open it, ignoramus. *(Brett deflates, falls out of character.)*

NICOLE. Be nice, Frank.

FRANK. I wasn't talking to Brett, I was talking to Eric the Wood Sprite *(Brett perks up slightly.)*

BRETT. Then let's open that door. Who's turn is it?

FRANK. Yours! Roll.

JUDY. Waste of a move. *(Brett shrugs and rolls.)*

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JOEL. You try to open it, but it's locked.

BRETT. Bummer.

FRANK. I'll use my mace. *(Rolls the die.)* Crap. Two.

JOEL. It dents the door.

JUDY. I'll ax it again. *(Rolls die.)* Twelve!

JOEL. You make a bigger dent.

NICOLE. I'll pick the lock.

JOEL. You need a three or higher.

FRANK. That's too low.

JOEL. It's in the rule book.

FRANK. Let me see.

JUDY. It's just a fucking door.

FRANK. He's bending the rules to favor Nicole.

NICOLE. He never favors me.

BRETT. Yeah, dude. Joel's cool.

FRANK. I want to see the rules. *(Joel, trying to keep his patience, looks though the pile of books to find the rule book. He hands it to Frank.)*

JOEL. Here. *(Frank takes the book without a word and begins to read it.)*

NICOLE. Should I wait?

JOEL. Roll. It'll be moot if you roll a two. *(Nicole rolls the die.)*

NICOLE. Eight. *(They look to Frank.)*

JOEL. Even if I did lessen the success role, which I didn't, they're rarely higher than six for a door.

FRANK. Wait 'til I find it. *(They stare daggers into Frank.)* It is three. But when we confronted the moving trees, the wood sprite could only save himself. The rest of us had to roll to escape. Everybody except Brett needs to go back to the forest.

JUDY. I'm not going back to the fucking forest.

FRANK. You have to.

JOEL. No. I changed that so we weren't stuck in the forest while Brett went to the castle.

FRANK. I challenge that change.

JUDY. Oh, let it go!

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NICOLE. Let's vote on it. All in favor of moving back to the forest, raise your hand. *(Frank's hand shoots into the air. The others do not move, Judy's arms are crossed. Brett is waffling.)*

JOEL. *(To Brett.)* You'll end up in the castle facing Trog by yourself.

BRETT. Oh. *(He drops his hand to his side.)*

NICOLE. Sorry, Frank, majority rules.

FRANK. Majority is wrong.

JOEL. *(Ignoring him.)* Marigold unlocks the door. Inside you find an ornate throne room filled with all the gold Trog has stolen. *(Visual effect of a golden light shining on them.)*

BRETT. *(Into it.)* Wow, dude. I can picture it all shiny and shit!

JOEL. I'll roll a protection spell over us. *(Rolls a die.)* Thirteen. Not bad.

JUDY. Not good in my case.

BRETT. Come out and play, Trog?

JOEL. You must find him, Brett. Where to?

BRETT. No clue.

FRANK. He's gotta be in one of the towers.

JUDY. Let Brett choose.

FRANK. That could take all night.

BRETT. Let's check out the first tower, guys. *(Picks up the die and rolls.)*

BRETT. Eleven.

JOEL. You sprint to the top.

FRANK. It's a new room. You need to roll another protection spell. *(Nobody is happy with this suggestion, but Joel rolls regardless. He is disappointed at the results.)*

JOEL. Three!?! Crap. *(Nicole touches his shoulder.)*

JUDY. Are you fucking kidding me? Trog'll destroy us with one blow.

BRETT. Don't worry. We'll protect you.

FRANK. Not if it puts my character at risk.

JUDY. Thanks a lot, jerk ass. *(Frank reacts, not liking being sworn at.)*

NICOLE. Judy...

JUDY. I was talking to Maximus the Troll. *(They all smirk at Frank's words being thrown back in his face.)*

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JOEL. You guys better stop fighting amongst yourselves, because Trog's in the tower and he's not happy to see us.

JUDY. Time to kick some King Ogre ass! *(Nicole rises.)*

NICOLE. Can I get anybody a drink?

FRANK. *(Shocked.)* You're going to take a break now? We're about to face Trog.

NICOLE. Which could take the rest of the night.

JUDY. Some more gin and tonic, please.

JOEL. A beer would be great.

BRETT. Got any munchies?

NICOLE. I can open a bag of something. *(Looks at Frank.)* Would you like another diet Dr. Pepper?

FRANK. No.

NICOLE. I'll be right back.

BRETT. I'll come with. I need a smoke. *(Nicole and Brett exit.)*

FRANK. *(Sighs.)* We're not going to finish tonight.

JUDY. Yeah, we're gonna finish early tomorrow morning. *(Frank digs through the books on the table.)*

JOEL. *(To Judy.)* Doing anything this weekend?

JUDY. *(Shrugs.)* Not much. You guys.

JOEL. Just some work around the house. *(Frank pulls a book out of the pile, almost with disgust.)*

FRANK. This isn't a rule book.

JOEL. That's paint swatches.

JUDY. Are you guys painting this room?

JOEL. We're thinking about.

FRANK. If you do, we should play at my house. *(Judy and Joel share a look that can almost be described as terror.)*

JUDY. Playing at your house sucks.

FRANK. My game room's bigger.

JUDY. Joel and Nicole are better hosts. They serve dinner, drinks and snacks.

FRANK. I have drinks.

JUDY. Diet Dr. Pepper. No alcohol.

FRANK. I don't drink.

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JUDY. Your guests do.

FRANK. Then they should bring their own.

JUDY. I work hard all week. It's nice to come here Friday nights and not have to think about anything. *(To Joel.)* Thanks to you and Nicole. *(They won't notice a slight guilt in Joel's expression.)*

JOEL. We're happy to do it.

FRANK. Nicole could cook at my place.

JUDY. They'd have to lug everything over. And clean it up, too, I bet.

FRANK. If they make a mess, they should clean it.

JUDY. Then you make poor Brett go down the street to smoke.

FRANK. He's stupid for smoking in the first place. I don't want my place to smell like nicotine. And if he's smoking something else, I don't want to get arrested. *(Judy rolls her eyes at this outdated belief. But they've probably had this debate multiple times to no avail.)*

JOEL. Brett's always respectful of what he smokes and where.

FRANK. Well, you're missing out on my perfect game room.

JUDY. Invite your other gaming friends over. *(This shuts Frank up. To Joel.)* What color're you thinking? *(A slight sense that Joel does not want to talk about this.)*

JOEL. We're not sure yet. *(Nicole and Brett return. Brett is carrying Judy's drinks and a bag of cheese puffs.)*

JUDY. *(To Nicole.)* A dark, earthy color would work in here. *(Nicole is caught off-guard.)*

JOEL. I told them we were thinking about painting.

FRANK. We can play at my place while you paint.

BRETT & JUDY. No!

FRANK. It has a bigger table. I wouldn't have to smell Brett's smoky breath.

BRETT. Think of me as a dragon.

FRANK. Dragons wouldn't smell that bad. Besides, you're a wood sprite.

BRETT. Yeah, I'm all natural and shit. *(Offers him the bag.)* Cheese puff?

FRANK. *(To Brett.)* You're going to get orange residue all over everything. *(To all.)* This is why I don't allow food at my game nights.

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JUDY. This is why your game nights suck.

NICOLE. Whose turn is it?

FRANK. Judy's. *(They slowly return to their characters. Judy leaps out of her chair and faces the audience.)*

JUDY. I'm going to batter him with arrows. Weaken him from afar before he can attack. *(Judy mimes shoot arrows over the audience. Joel rises, a sense that he is presiding over events.)*

JOEL. Only three points damage. *(Frank slowly gets out of his seat and begins to swing his mace over his head. He strikes at an invisible object before him. Brett joins them, all he has to defend himself is a little plastic knife. Nicole joins them, she has a little dagger and mouths spells. Joel casts spells with histrionic hand gestures. They battle for a few moments, cheering and jeering. Suddenly, Brett falls to the ground.)* Eric the Wood Sprite is dead.

FRANK. Hope our combined strength is enough to take down Trog.

JUDY. Not if I keep rolling these low numbers. *(Brett rises, much to Frank's dismay.)*

FRANK. What're you doing?

BRETT. Going to smoke.

FRANK. We're not waiting for you.

BRETT. Who cares, dude. I'm dead. *(Brett exits. The others remain downstage, but have broken from character.)*

FRANK. Brett better not pick a weak character next game. I'm tired of the rest of us doing all the work. *(Joel and Nicole share a look. Frank swings his mace to attack the unseen foe. He smiles.)* That had to do some damage.

JOEL. It did, but Trog is lashing out.

NICOLE. Don't worry, we'll get him. *(The four once again start to attack the unseen enemy. During this, Brett will return, take his seat at the table and watch them intently while snacking. After a moment, Judy will collapse.)*

JOEL. Jude the Warrior is dead

JUDY. Fuck. That spider messed me up. Goddamn it, I've had my character for years.

FRANK. I'm going to lose lots of points now.

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JOEL. We've weakened Trog. Let's hammer him. *(Judy joins Brett at the table as the others attack again, with a sense that they are hitting Trog hard. After a moment, Frank makes a broad stroke with his mace. The others freeze.)*

FRANK. Got him!

JOEL. Trog the Ogre King falls to his death. *(They all cheer and make their way back to the table. As the scene progresses, they will slowly remove any extraneous costume pieces.)*

FRANK. Let's divide the gold between the three of us.

JUDY. I get shit. And have to start from scratch next time.

BRETT. It's OK, girl, so am I.

FRANK. You always start from scratch. *(To Joel.)* How much is the gold worth? I want to stock up on weapons and supplies for our next quest. *(Joel and Nicole share another look. This one is longer and if the audience missed it before, there's no doubting now that there's something on their minds.)*

JOEL. There's... not going to be a next game. *(Frank, Brett and Judy look shocked.)*

FRANK. Are you going to Europe again?

JOEL. Better.

NICOLE. I'm pregnant. *(Frank, Brett and Judy are stunned.)*

FRANK. A baby won't be here for nine months.

NICOLE. *(Correcting.)* Seven months. We're more than ten weeks in.

FRANK. We can still complete two or three quests in that time.

BRETT. Wait? There's going to be, like, a little Barrington dude running around here.

NICOLE. Or dudette.

BRETT. Awesome.

FRANK. After that, we can play when the baby's asleep.

JUDY. You guys never mentioned wanting kids.

JOEL. It was next on the list: get married, buy a house, have kids.

JUDY. We were supposed to be different. You guys ruined it. *(Nicole is hurt by their reactions.)*

JOEL. Can you at least congratulate us on what's supposed to be happy news?

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BRETT. It's awesome! I'm going to be like an uncle. *(Beat.)* You will let me see him, right?

NICOLE. Or her. Of course.

FRANK. That's great. But it doesn't mean we have to end our game.

JOEL. We thought the end of this quest would be a good stopping point.

JUDY. Guess it doesn't matter now that my character's dead.

FRANK. We can find other gamers.

JUDY. Who? We're the only people over thirty who still play Masters of the Dark Realm. Might as well slash my wrists right now.

JOEL. Let's not get over dramatic. We're still friends.

NICOLE. Come over next Friday night for dinner and some other games.

JUDY. Why bother? Once the baby comes it'll be all about that. You won't call us unless you need something. Then you'll make friends with other couples with kids and we'll be left out in the cold. *(Joel and Nicole are unsure what to say.)*

NICOLE. We know this is a lot to digest. Let's talk about it more next week.

FRANK. What's the point if we're not playing Masters of the Dark Realm?

JUDY. For once, I agree with Frank.

BRETT. Dudes, it's the beginning of a beautiful new life. That little seed growing in there will sprout into something amazing. He could be an astronaut, a scientist, or a movie star.

NICOLE. Let's aim for the first two.

JOEL. It's late. You guys decide if you still want to come to dinner next week. *(They collect their props and costumes and start to rise.)*

JUDY. Guess it beats popping something into the microwave.

BRETT. Our little girl has a bun in the microwave. It's going to grow into a wonderful pastry. Mmmm... Who wants to hit Denny's on the way home? *(They all shake their heads. It seems to be routine that Nicole shows them out. They exchange good nights. Brett, Frank, Judy and Nicole exit. Joel sits down to write in one of his notebooks.)*

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JOEL. *(Speaks out loud as he writes.)* Chronicling the final quest of the Fellowship of The Dark Realm. *(He continues to write until Nicole returns.)*

NICOLE. That didn't go as planned. *(Joel is too enthralled in his writing to hear her.)* Earth to the Dark Realm.

JOEL. *(Looking up.)* Huh?

NICOLE. I thought they'd be happy for us. Not so... self-absorbed.

JOEL. They are happy for us. They just don't know how to show it. Except for Brett.

NICOLE. That was too much. *(Imitating Brett.)* "You've got a caterpillar in your cocoon. It's going to grow into a beautiful butterfly."

JOEL. Sometimes I don't think those guys are role playing. Brett really is a wood sprite.

NICOLE. Frank is a troll. *(Joel stands and puts his arms around Nicole.)*

JOEL. And you're my beautiful elf. You've shown me a magical realm I never knew existed.

NICOLE. And you constantly impressed me with the imaginary worlds you created. You're going to be a wonderful father.

JOEL. *(Reflection.)* I feel like I'm abandoning my friends.

NICOLE. It's time we all moved on... to new adventures.

JOEL. How can they? We've got each other in our fellowship. They're alone.

NICOLE. No. They have us. We'll always be there for them.

JOEL. That's why I love you, my little elf.

NICOLE. That's why I love you, my mighty wizard. *(They kiss.)* Let's go make some magic in the bedroom. *(Joel touches her stomach.)*

JOEL. We already have.

NICOLE. Then think of this as a bonus roll... in the hay.

JOEL. *(With a groan.)* That was so awful, it makes me love you even more. *(Motions to books.)* I gotta chronicle tonight's history first. *(Nicole is about to object, but stops herself.)*

NICOLE. Your last entry. *(With a sense of sadness, Joel returns to his seat.)*

JOEL. Yeah. My last. *(Nicole watches him for a moment.)*

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NICOLE. I'll clean the kitchen. *(Joel doesn't reply. Nicole exits. Joel writes, bittersweetly emerged in the world he's writing about.)*

JOEL. As they entered the unfamiliar forest, little did they realize this was the beginning of the end of their fellowship. *(The lights slowly fade.)*

SCENE 2

A week later. There should be a very slight change to the room. One baby-themed item added. But the rule books remain. Joel, Nicole, Brett, Frank and Judy, now dressed in everyday clothes, are seated around the table. They are finishing a game of Sorry. Nicole has just taken her last piece home.

NICOLE. I won!

BRETT. You go, girl.

FRANK. This game stinks.

NICOLE. It brings back fond childhood memories.

FRANK. Sorry you had a boring childhood.

JUDY. Even your childhood was superior to ours?

JOEL. Because I was a part of it. *(Joel begins to put away the game.)*

BRETT. That's right, you dudes knew each other the longest. How'd you meet?

JOEL. We've told you this story.

BRETT. I don't remember.

FRANK. No surprises there. *(Beat.)* Joel used to bully me at school *(Nicole is the most surprised to hear this.)*

NICOLE. *(To Joel.)* You bullied the guy we invite into our home weekly? How did I not know this?

JOEL. I don't like to talk about it. I'm not proud of that time in my life. But it was either bully him or be bullied myself.

NICOLE. What caused your change of heart?

JOEL. A change of schools. When I got to middle school, I had my ass handed to me on a lunch serving tray by the bigger kids.

NICOLE. Good.

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JOEL. It was like an after school special. The bully learned what it was like to be bullied, so stopped. I wanted Frank not to be scared of me any longer, so when I saw him looking through his Magic the Gathering cards in study hall-

FRANK. Can't believe I was brave enough to take them out around Joel.

JOEL. They looked fascinating, so I asked him to teach me how to play.

FRANK. It was either Joel or nobody. So I took a chance. He picked it up quickly.

JOEL. Then we discovered Masters of the Dark Realm. And the rest is history. *(Gestures to book.)* These histories to be exact. *(Joel motions to the piles of game books. Brett and Judy look to them, wistfully.)*

JUDY. How many games do you think we played?

BRETT. Thousands, man. We played on all those snow days and summer vacations.

JOEL. And all those marathons during our college breaks. Then every night.

FRANK. Until Nicole came along and made Joel reduce it to one night a week.

NICOLE. I admit, I was reluctant to join, but once I did, I enjoyed it.

FRANK. We invested so much time creating histories for our characters. It's a shame to throw that all away.

JOEL. We're not throwing it away; we're closing a chapter.

FRANK. Forever.

BRETT. All life is change, dude.

FRANK. That's hilarious coming from you.

JOEL. Nicole and I see our lives as a quest. Finding each other, falling in love, building, or rather buying, a castle. Now siring an heir.

NICOLE. Promise me you'll never again refer to our having a baby as siring an heir.

JOEL. Deal. The point is, we had our own adventures outside the game, so we'd like to help each of you start a personal quest. *(Confused stares from the others.)*

JUDY. Why?

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JOEL. Because we're your friends. If you can't talk to us about your future goals, who can you talk to?

FRANK. I completed my goals. I got a great programming job, bought a spacious townhouse and still have money to buy any book, graphic novel or gaming system I want.

NICOLE. That's great. But... what about friends?

FRANK. I've got you guys. Or at least Judy and Brett after the baby comes.

JUDY. You think we'll tolerate you without them? Ha!

BRETT. Don't be so harsh on the guy. I'm still his buddy.

JOEL. Your quest should be finding some new gaming friends. Some Saturday we'll go to a game store and assemble you a new fellowship.

FRANK. Why would I play in one of those awful smelling places when I have a game room at home?

JUDY. Which is collecting dust because in reality, nobody wants to play with an asshole like you.

FRANK. Don't swear at me.

JUDY. I'm only speaking the truth.

BRETT. You have to relax around other people, dude, and you'll be fine. Don't be as intense as you are with us, and they won't call you a game Nazi. *(Frank tries to conceal his hurt at this comment.)*

FRANK. You guys call me a game Nazi?

JUDY. All the time.

FRANK. Why?

BRETT. Because you're so anal.

FRANK. That's not very PC.

NICOLE. We know. We don't mean-

FRANK. I'm Jewish!

BRETT. You are, dude? Marvel Top. *(They all stare at Brett.)*

FRANK. Sorry that I'm the only one here who plays by the rules. Do you think it's OK to break the law, too?

NICOLE. You need to respect other players' house rules.

FRANK. Not if they're wrong. This is a game, not anarchy.

JOEL. So finding other gamers who can tolerate him will be part of his quest.

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JUDY. Good luck with that.

NICOLE. Judy, Brett, do you have any dreams?

BRETT. Man, I have the weirdest dreams: getting eaten by giant plants, walking on the moon, swimming with pink dolphins. They're so real.

NICOLE. I mean in life. Goals. *(Brett and Judy shrug.)* Do either of you want to get married? *(Brett shakes his head.)*

JUDY. No fucking way.

FRANK. Why didn't you ask me if I wanted to get married?

JOEL. Do you want to get married, Frank?

FRANK. No.

NICOLE. How do you plan to spend your free time, Judy?

JUDY. I've been taking up dirt biking.

BRETT. That's awesome!

NICOLE. What'll you do in the winter?

JUDY. I dunno... Snowmobile?

NICOLE. How about something that helps you meet people?

JUDY. Don't tell me what to do.

NICOLE. Fine. *(To Brett.)* What about you, Brett?

BRETT. My life's perfect. *(Frank snorts with laughter. Nicole and Joel shoot him a look.)*

JOEL. I hate to disagree, Brett. But you're living at home, and you work as a night clerk at the Gas-n-Grub. Don't you want more out of life?

BRETT. I'm cool. *(Joel looks to Nicole for help.)*

NICOLE. You see yourself living with your mom for the rest of your life?

BRETT. No. Just the rest of her life. It's sad, but she'll die someday. Then I'll have the house to myself. It's my inheritance.

JOEL. Let's hope that's a long time from now. What will you do until then?

BRETT. Play video games.

NICOLE. A house, even if it's paid for, has lots of expenses. Many unexpected. Your inheritance may not cover it all.

BRETT. No?

JOEL. Wouldn't you like a better job? A career.

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BRETT. I love the Gas-n-Grub.

JOEL. Your salary has capped as a clerk. How about moving up to store or regional manager?

JUDY. Do Gas-n-Grubs have regional managers?

JOEL. If they don't, other stores do. Don't you want to grow?

NICOLE. Like a tree?

JOEL. Exactly. Like a tree.

BRETT. I'm a wood sprite. My job is to help other things grow. Like the little seed in your belly.

NICOLE. To help somebody grow, you have to grow yourself.

FRANK. And stop smoking pot.

BRETT. Pot is good for you. It dilates the mind.

FRANK. It burns it out. If Brett goes on an interview, he's going to smoke a cigarette before he gets there and stink up the room.

BRETT. I quit smoking cigarettes. *(They are all a cross between surprised and in disbelief about this.)*

NICOLE. You did?

FRANK. You're lying.

JUDY. He hasn't gone outside all night.

BRETT. I quit last Friday, technically Saturday morning. Had my last one on the way home from here. Haven't smoked since.

JOEL. You quit cold turkey?

BRETT. Yup.

FRANK. But not pot?

BRETT. Don't be crazy, man.

JOEL. Why?

BRETT. We're gonna have a baby, dudes. I have to set a good example for it. Oh... I shouldn't call him or her an it, don't want it to get a complex.

NICOLE. *(Touched by this.)* You quit smoking because I'm pregnant?

BRETT. Don't want that toxic crap to hurt the baby.

FRANK. But it was OK to hurt us.

BRETT. You're all grown up. That baby's lungs are going to start developing soon. Gotta make sure he or she grows up strong.

NICOLE. I don't know what to say.

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JOEL. Thanks, Brett. We're honored you'd do that for our baby.

BRETT. It's no biggie.

JOEL. Quitting smoking is a pretty big accomplishment. But when the time is right, we should talk about your future. You obviously have willpower, if you applied that to your career, you'd be unstoppable.

FRANK. He needs to quit smoking pot next.

NICOLE. Baby steps.

BRETT. That's hilarious. Baby steps! From the baby momma. But no, I'm not quitting pot.

JUDY. I don't need a Game Master for my real life. None of us do.

JOEL. You need a little push.

FRANK. Like you gave me when we were in elementary school.

JOEL. That's what I get for opening old wounds.

JUDY. Knowing Frank, he's been waiting all these years to get back at you.

JOEL. What's he going to do? Push me down our stairs? Even Frank isn't that petty? *(Beat. To Frank.)* Are you?

FRANK. No. And I don't need your help.

BRETT. Neither do I, dudes. Focus on the little one.

JUDY. Stop trying to force us to conform.

JOEL. Fine. We'll leave you be.

BRETT. You'll still have us over on Fridays, right?

FRANK. Are we going to play crappy games like this?

JOEL. Only if you bring up elementary school again.

BRETT. Sounds like we're cool then.

JOEL. Yeah, cool. Maybe we should call it a night.

FRANK. So early? We haven't left before midnight... well... ever.

BRETT. Let's go. Baby momma needs her sleep.

NICOLE. Could you stay a few minutes, Judy? I'd like to talk to you.

JUDY. *(Confused/suspicious.)* I guess...

JOEL. I'll show the boys out. *(Joel, Brett and Frank rise.)*

FRANK. Nicole usually does that.

JOEL. It's OK, I know where the door is.

BRETT. Embrace change, dude. *(Frank sighs. Joel, Brett and Frank exit. Nicole and Judy sit awkward for a moment.)*

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JUDY. If you kept me here to talk to another woman about what your body is going through, forget it. I don't give a crap about that stuff.

NICOLE. That much I figured. I wanted to talk about you.

JUDY. I'd rather talk about what's happening in your womb. Stay out of my personal life.

NICOLE. It's time to drop your defenses. We're alone now. You can tell me your secret desires.

JUDY. My what?

NICOLE. *(Almost whispers.)* Do you want to find a girlfriend?

JUDY. *(Shocked.)* What?

NICOLE. It's OK. Joel and I want you to find somebody who makes you happy. We can go to a lesbian bar. They have those, right?

JUDY. How the fuck would I know? I'm not a fucking lesbian.

NICOLE. But...

JUDY. What the fuck is wrong with you? Just because I'm not all girly girl like you doesn't mean I'm gay? Go screw yourself. *(Judy storms out. A few moments later we hear a door slam. Joel returns.)*

JOEL. So... Judy ready to march in the gay pride parade?

NICOLE. This was a huge mistake.

JOEL. Our little fellowship is reluctant about the direction of their quests, but as Game Masters, we will guide them in the right direction.

NICOLE. These are people's lives, Joel, not a game.

JOEL. But the only way they can think of the world is as a quest.

NICOLE. We need to focus on our own lives.

JOEL. We can do both. In college, I had two quests running simultaneously.

NICOLE. So having a baby is a game to you?

JOEL. No! I'm saying we can do both.

NICOLE. Sorry to say, but after tonight, I don't think they're worth it. Let them go out there and fail, succeed or not do a damn thing. We offered, they refused. Time to move on. *(Joel is not too happy about this.)*

JOEL. If they take us up on our offer, we'll help them, right?

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NICOLE. Of course. But they won't. Meanwhile, we need to get ready for baby. Starting with this room. (*Motions to rule books.*) What're we going to do with these books?

JOEL. I have to sort out what I'm keeping and trashing.

NICOLE. It's early. Get cracking.

JOEL. (*Playfully.*) I'd rather release the Kraken in the bedroom.

NICOLE. How about we role play? You're the man who cleans the game room, and I'm the woman who washes the dishes.

JOEL. You're a dirty girl.

NICOLE. And I'd like to get clean before the baby comes.

JOEL. Fine, I'll sort. (*Nicole starts to exit.*)

NICOLE. Less sort, more trash. (*She exits. Joel sits down, picks up one of the rule books, opens it and before he can do anything, he's hooked. Lights fade as he reads.*)

SCENE 3

The next day. There is plastic tarp laid out around the room. A stack of rule books should figure prominently on the table, they are not covered. Nicole, now wearing a paint smock, enters carrying a bucket of paint and some supplies. As she places them down, Joel enters.

JOEL. What're you doing?

NICOLE. Open heart surgery. What does it look like I'm doing? I'm painting the baby's room.

JOEL. I was going to do that. I am the creator of lands, remember?

NICOLE. All you're creating is a butt imprint on the sofa. I'm not letting it go another day, even if I have to do it myself.

JOEL. The fumes may be bad for the baby.

NICOLE. I've opened every window. I'll be fine.

JOEL. Let me know if you feel dizzy.

NICOLE. I wouldn't want to wake you from your nap.

JOEL. Don't be silly. I'm going to help. Together we'll finish quicker.

NICOLE. Not with the way you get distracted. (*Joel spots the rule books. Crosses to them.*)

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JOEL. We need to store these somewhere safe.

NICOLE. I'll see if Fort Knox is available. *(Joel scoops them up.)*

JOEL. I'll put them downstairs.

NICOLE. I don't want them cluttering the house. Aren't you throwing them out?

JOEL. Would you throw out a Bible?

NICOLE. If a stack of them were cluttering up my room, yes. We'll never use those games again.

JOEL. They're like scrap books. They hold wonderful memories.

NICOLE. Fine. We'll find a nice spot for them in the attic. After we- *(Nicole stops and shifts strangely. Joel panics, puts the books down.)*

JOEL. What's wrong?

NICOLE. My cell phone's on vibrate and I'm getting a call. *(Nicole reaches into her pocket under the smock.)*

JOEL. You shouldn't keep your phone so close to your uterus.

NICOLE. That's the strangest thing anybody's ever said to me. And I play Masters of the Dark Realm. *(Looks at the phone, surprised.)* It's Frank.

JOEL. Calling you? Why?

NICOLE. Let's find out. *(She answers the phone.)* Hi, Frank... No, we're not mad at you... Of course, Joel still wants to go to the game store with you. *(Winks at Joel.)* How about I tell him to call you and insist he take you so it doesn't look like you asked... You're welcome. *(Hangs up. To Joel.)* You don't need your wizard powers to figure that out.

JOEL. The temperature of Hades is at a record low.

NICOLE. That had to be difficult for him.

JOEL. I knew they'd come around eventually.

NICOLE. Wait a half hour to call him. So it looked like you needed convincing.

JOEL. If you think— *(SFX of a doorbell. Nicole sighs.)*

NICOLE. We're never going to get this room painted.

JOEL. That better not be your parents.

NICOLE. At least mine would help paint while pointing out all we're doing wrong. Yours would just talk our ears off.

JOEL. I'll get rid of them. *(Joel starts to exit. Nicole stops him.)*

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NICOLE. You start painting. I'll give them the boot. *(Nicole starts to exit.)*

JOEL. If it's Mormons, send them up to help.

NICOLE. They don't come around after you tried to sell them the monkey worshiping religion you created for Masters of the Dark Realm.

JOEL. You're welcome. *(Nicole exits. Joel begins to flip through the books. He smiles, reminiscing. After a few moments:)*

NICOLE. *(O.S.)* Look who's here. *(Nicole and Brett enter.)*

BRETT. Hey, man.

JOEL. Brett? What brings you here?

BRETT. You guys said you were painting today, so I came to offer my services.

JOEL. We weren't insinuating that you had to help. *(Nicole jumps in before he can say more.)*

NICOLE. But we appreciate it.

BRETT. My pleasure. I can't believe we're turning our gaming room into the baby's room. All the memories here. *(Brett stares around the room. Joel stares back at the books. Nicole fears she's already losing them.)*

NICOLE. Think of all the new memories we'll be making.

BRETT. Yeah, can't wait to see the little guy or girl take their first step, say their first word, graduate college.

NICOLE. *(A little creeped out.)* We'll take plenty of pictures and videos.

JOEL. I hope we can afford college by the time he gets there.

NICOLE. Or she.

BRETT. Your kid's gonna be so smart, he or she'll get a scholarship to Harvard for sure.

JOEL. From your lips to the Game Master in the sky's ears.

NICOLE. You believe people should go to college, Brett?

BRETT. Yeah, college is cool.

NICOLE. Why don't you go?

BRETT. I went for a couple of months. That stuff's not for me.

NICOLE. Don't you want to lead your honorary niece or nephew by example.

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BRETT. *(Touched by this.)* I'm going to be an honorary uncle?

JOEL. Of course. We consider you, Frank and Judy family.

BRETT. That's so freakin' cool.

NICOLE. Being an honorary uncle is a big responsibility.

JOEL. Hope you're up to the challenge.

BRETT. I am, guys. Totally.

JOEL. If something terrible should happen to me and Nicole-

NICOLE. God forbid, Joel...

JOEL. You're going to have to help look after our offspring.

NICOLE. Let's not put that out in the universe. *(Joel turns and winks at Nicole. She is having none of it.)*

BRETT. I'll make sure the little critter is taken care of.

JOEL. By working at Gas-n-Grub?

BRETT. My mom'll help.

JOEL. Your mom might die before we do.

NICOLE. Joel! That's enough!

JOEL. But-

NICOLE. We're not going to talk about negative things in front of our baby. Especially in his or her future room. *(Joel deflates.)*

JOEL. Sorry.

NICOLE. Let's paint.

JOEL. Sure. *(To Brett.)* Can you wash these brushes? *(Joel hands Brett a pack of new brushes. Nicole is caught off-guard.)*

NICOLE. Joel?

JOEL. Use the kitchen sink. That one's easier to clean.

BRETT. Aye, aye, captain! *(Brett exits.)*

NICOLE. *(About to lose patience.)* What're you doing? Those brushes are brand new.

JOEL. I had to get rid of him for a moment.

NICOLE. I'd like to get rid of you for the day.

JOEL. Don't you see, our plan will work if we divide and conquer.

NICOLE. We don't have time for this.

JOEL. It won't take long. I'll handle Frank. You handle Judy-

NICOLE. She wants nothing to do with me.

JOEL. Give her time. Like Frank, she'll turn around.

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NICOLE. I doubt it.

JOEL. Together we'll work on Brett. This is perfect. It's just like the game. The gang has to figure out who their characters are before they start their quest.

NICOLE. And who's going to paint? The Mormons?

JOEL. I can Game Master them and be your Wizard at the same time.
(Nicole presents a paint brush to him.)

NICOLE. OK, Mr. Wizard, grab your magic wand and go.

JOEL. I will. But first, this Wizard's gotta take a whizz. *(Nicole shakes her head as Joel exits. She returns to putting down plastic sheets by herself as the lights fade.)*

SCENE 4

The game area is dark. For this scene, downstage will represent multiple areas. Lights up downstage right where there is one folding chair facing outward. Frank and Joel enter. They stare into the audience.

FRANK. There's only kids here.

JOEL. *(Points into audience.)* Those guys are older.

FRANK. They own the place. *(Joel motions to the chair.)*

JOEL. A game's starting at that table. There's room for one more.

FRANK. It's Settlers of Catan, not Masters of the Dark Realm.

JOEL. This crowd's too young for Masters of the Dark Realm. Once you make new friends, you can build a new fellowship.

FRANK. I don't want a fellowship filled with unhygienic kids.

JOEL. Then go find the diamonds in the rough. *(Joel gives Frank a gentle push toward the chair.)*

FRANK. Again with the pushing me. *(Lights up downstage left. There are a couple of stools. Judy and Nicole enter. Judy appears reluctant.)*

NICOLE. Are you OK with this?

JUDY. No.

NICOLE. Take your time.

JUDY. I'm not a lesbian.

NICOLE. I understand.

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JUDY. I mean, I've had crushes on women...

NICOLE. Haven't we all.

JUDY. But never acted on them. *(Beat.)* Maybe once or twice in college. *(Beat.)* Three times if you count-

NICOLE. *(Cutting her off.)* We all kissed girls in college.

JUDY. I never thought of myself as... an active lesbian.

NICOLE. I'm here to support you no matter what stage of lesbian you're in.

JUDY. That's nice of you, especially after all the mean things I said the other night.

NICOLE. We elves have strong shields. And big ears for listening.

JUDY. If you keep talking that nerdy, I'm going to send you home.

NICOLE. Sorry, Joel's been rubbing off on me. Wanna go in?

JUDY. Can I role for courage?

NICOLE. What was that about nerdy talk? *(Judy summons her courage and moves to one of the stools. Lights up downstage center. Brett enters. He is now wearing a button-down shirt, which is buttoned one-off and very wrinkled.)*

BRETT. *(To the audience.)* Well? *(Joel and Nicole cross to stand on either side of him.)*

JOEL. It's a good start.

NICOLE. If you want the person interviewing you to laugh you out of the store.

BRETT. Dudes. It's only a drug store.

NICOLE. Doesn't matter, you should treat it like a Fortune 500 company.

BRETT. A what?

JOEL. Pretend you're interviewing to be Prince of the Realm.

BRETT. *(Getting it.)* Ohhh... *(Brett exits. Joel steps back to the right stage. Focus on Frank and Joel. Frank sits in the chair and Joel stands behind him.)*

JOEL. How's it going?

FRANK. They're breaking every rule in the book.

JOEL. Are you having fun?

FRANK. How can I have fun when they're playing the game wrong?

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JOEL. I hope you didn't tell them that.

FRANK. I did, but they stopped listening to me after a while.

JOEL. This may work out after all. *(Joel moves back to center stage. Brett returns. He has a different shirt, a little nicer, buttoned correctly. He also wears a loose tie.)*

BRETT. Well?

NICOLE. Better... but...

JOEL. Needs a little more.

NICOLE. Fix your tie.

JOEL. Tuck in your shirt.

NICOLE. Do you own any slacks?

BRETT. Slacks?

JOEL. A nice pair of pants?

BRETT. Man, looking for work is a lot of work. I need a pot break.

NICOLE & JOEL. No! *(Brett exits. Nicole moves to sit on the stool next to Judy.)*

NICOLE. Are you OK?

JUDY. Stop asking me that. I'm here, right?

NICOLE. Yeah, but...

JUDY. What happened to working at my pace?

NICOLE. We will. It's just that...

JUDY. *(Snaps.)* What?

NICOLE. All the women are at the other end of the bar.

JUDY. They'll come down here eventually. *(Judy crosses her arms. There is a scowl on her face. Nicole shakes her head at this stand-offish appearance.)*

NICOLE. What could possibly keep them away? *(Nicole rises and moves back to center stage. Brett returns. He's wearing slacks, his tie is fixed, but he has on sneakers and his hair is a mess.)*

BRETT. My mom almost didn't recognize me.

JOEL. That's a good sign.

NICOLE. Do you have a decent pair of shoes?

BRETT. What's wrong with these?

NICOLE. They're sneakers.

JOEL. What size are you? Maybe I can lend you a pair.

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BRETT. I have shoes somewhere. I think.

NICOLE. Let's talk about your hair.

BRETT. Isn't it great?

NICOLE. No. Do you have a comb?

BRETT. Somewhere. I think.

NICOLE. Let's make your mom think you're a stranger. *(Brett exits. Joel steps back to Frank. Frank rises from the seat.)*

FRANK. That was a disaster.

JOEL. Don't be so hard on yourself, it was your first try.

FRANK. I'm not being hard on me, I'm being hard on them. Those kids never read a rule book, claiming that's how they always played it.

Hello... I've been playing these games since before they were born. That is not how you play.

JOEL. Then we'll try something else. Any response to your Craig's List ad?

FRANK. Only people looking for sex.

JOEL. From a role-playing ad?

FRANK. They assumed a different kind of role playing.

JOEL. Who knew there were so many women into that stuff?

FRANK. Not just women.

JOEL. Nothing from your on-line forums?

FRANK. A few interests, but after I explained my rules, I never heard back from them.

JOEL. I wonder why... Want to join another game here?

FRANK. No. I feel like a creepy old guy hanging out with little kids.

JOEL. Then maybe it's time to do the unthinkable. Sign up for World of Warcraft. *(Frank is offended by that.)*

FRANK. No! Never! That goes against everything Masters of the Dark Realm stands for. *(Beat.)* Looks like I'll have to live the rest of my life without ever playing my favorite game again. On the bright side, I'll be dead in less than sixty years. *(Sulking, Frank exits. Joel looks after him, wishing he could do more. Joel moves to his spot center stage. Brett returns. He has shoes on and his hair is somewhat managed.)*

JOEL. Perfect!

BRETT. All right, dude!

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NICOLE. Very close.

BRETT. What? If I got any more dressed up, I'd have to go work for Wall Street.

NICOLE. How about a jacket?

BRETT. I got a Members Only.

NICOLE. A suit jacket.

JOEL. I could lend you one.

BRETT. I got one from my grandpa's funeral. I think. *(Brett exits. Nicole moves to Judy. Judy rises from the stool, she looks unhappy.)*

NICOLE. Don't beat yourself up, Judy. You're not going to meet the girl of your dreams your first time at a lesbian bar.

JUDY. I felt like an elf among dwarves.

NICOLE. Because you're... your own person. It'll take time for the other girls to get to know you. We'll keep coming back.

JUDY. You'll be showing soon. They'll think we're married and expecting a baby.

NICOLE. Joel can go and be your... what's the lesbian equivalent of a fag hag?

JUDY. Nothing. They don't want men in their bars.

NICOLE. There were men there tonight. Weren't there? *(Judy shakes her head.)* How about on-line dating?

JUDY. No. On-line dating leads to... dates.

NICOLE. *(Confused.)* Isn't that the point?

JUDY. I need to learn how to be more... lesbian first.

NICOLE. Why? I didn't have to learn how to be straight. Just go out with a girl and have fun.

JUDY. *(Snaps.)* I'm not ready! OK? This whole thing was a stupid fucking idea. *(Judy storms off stage. Nicole looks after her, wishing she could do more. Nicole steps back to the center. Brett returns, he now wears a jacket.)*

JOEL. How'd the interview go?

NICOLE. Did you send them a thank you e-mail?

BRETT. The dude barely gave me a minute of his time.

JOEL. What?

NICOLE. Why?

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BRETT. I dunno. He was mad because I was a little late.

NICOLE. How little?

BRETT. Twenty minutes. *(Nicole and Joel groan in disappointment.)*

JOEL. What were you thinking, Brett?!

NICOLE. You can't be late for an interview. You should be twenty minutes early.

BRETT. Nobody told me that. Don't worry, I'll get back up on that horse. But in like a week or so. I need to recover from this. So much stress. I'm gonna toke. Care to join me?

NICOLE & JOEL. No.

BRETT. Cool. Later. *(Brett exits. Nicole and Brett look after him, shaking their heads.)*

NICOLE. This week was a waste of time.

JOEL. It's like the early days of a quest. They always seemed impossible. But we succeed in all of them.

NICOLE. Painting the baby's room feels like an impossible quest.

JOEL. What's the hurry? We have nine months.

NICOLE. Seven. And I won't be able to do much those last few months.

JOEL. I'll get the baby's room done this weekend. Honest.

NICOLE. That's what you said last weekend. You and Brett barely finished one wall.

JOEL. But that wall is a piece of art.

NICOLE. Because I touched it up! Is this what it's going to be like when the baby comes? You can't procrastinate changing diapers, feedings, and getting up in the middle of the night to stop him or her crying.

JOEL. *(Almost serious.)* Babies sound like a lot of work.

NICOLE. You better not expect me to do everything.

JOEL. Of course not, we're a fellowship. *(Nicole glares at him.)* Team! I meant team.

NICOLE. You better start putting as much effort into this quest as you do trying to help your friends. *(Before Joel can reply, Nicole exits. Joel stands alone contemplating his future, and he looks very worried about it. Lights slowly fade on him.)*

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SCENE 5

The following Friday night. The room has one or two more baby items in it. Joel, Nicole, Brett, Frank and Judy are sitting around the table. They all look sad and depressed. Nicole is the only one forcing a smile. Then tension between them all should be palpable.

JOEL. So, last weekend didn't go exactly as planned. But even in Masters of the Dark Realm we had weeks that set us back months. Right?

FRANK. If we started another quest right after we finished the last one, we'd be well into it by now.

NICOLE. If Joel had painted the room when he said he was going to, nobody would be allowed in here.

BRETT. I tried to help, dudes. But you were more interested in getting me a better job.

JUDY. Sorry I wasted your time taking you to... that... place.

NICOLE. That wasn't a waste of time.

FRANK. The waste of time was Joel going to the game store with me.

JOEL. This quest is off to a slow start. Soon you'll all find something magical-

JUDY. Give it a rest.

BRETT. I appreciate what you guys tried to do, but I'm good.

FRANK. We need to stop pretending and face the fact that our fellowship is parting ways.

JOEL. It isn't.

JUDY. I hate to say it, but Frank's right.

BRETT. We can't part ways, we're like honorary uncles to their baby.

JUDY. I'm not changing any crappy diapers.

FRANK. Or burping it so it can throw up on my good sweater.

NICOLE. OK, I've been patient, but enough is enough. It was only a game, and games end. It's up to you if you want the friendships to end, too. Joel and I love you and want you to remain in our lives. But you gotta stop being so selfish. *(Nicole looks at them one-by-one. As she*

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does, they turn their gaze away from her.>) You made the happiest event of our lives all about you. Never even thanking Joel for trying to make your lives better.

JOEL. They don't have to... *(Awkward silence.)*

FRANK. *(Reluctantly.)* Thank you for coming to the game store with me.

JOEL. I was happy to do it.

BRETT. Thank you guys for helping me get ready for that job interview.

JOEL. You're welcome.

BRETT. *(Almost scared to ask.)* Am I still going to be an honorary uncle?

NICOLE. Of course you are. *(All eyes are on Judy.)*

JUDY. What? *(Beat.)* I already thanked Nicole for going out with me last weekend.

NICOLE. And I'd happily do it again.

JOEL. She should. And then Frank and I- *(Nicole covers his mouth with her hand.)*

NICOLE. Let's stay present. *(Joel nods until Nicole removes her hand. Another, slightly less awkward pause.)*

JUDY. *(Going through the motions.)* Are we going to play a game or talk all night?

JOEL. We can play a game.

FRANK. One that doesn't suck.

NICOLE. I found more board games when I was cleaning out the closet. Maybe we can agree on one of them. *(Nicole gets up and crosses up stage.)*

JOEL. How about Hungry Hungry Hippos?

FRANK. No way!

BRETT. That'd be fun.

FRANK. If we were five-years old. *(Nicole appears to react with discomfort.)*

JOEL. We got cards. How about poker?

JUDY. Strip poker?

FRANK. No!

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JOEL. Ten years ago maybe, but not these days. I've been gaining sympathy weight with Nicole. Right, honey? *(No response. Nicole is bent over in pain. JOEL turns and looks at her with concern.)* Nicole?
NICOLE. *(On the verge of tears.)* Please take me to the hospital. *(A wave of fear washes over the group. Blackout.)*

END OF ACT 1

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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