THE ABSURDISTAN CHRONICLES · VOLUME 10

JEN AND THE MISSING DIE!

A BOARD-GAME NIGHT UNDER SUSPICION



Based on a true fictional event.

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Jen and the Missing Die!

A BOARD-GAME NIGHT UNDER SUSPICION

For every place that is supposedly just around the corner.

A story from Goldhain and the neighbouring possibilities.

Based on a true fictional event.

Prologue - The Sixth Pip



Board-game night was peaceful until Jen wanted to roll.

The table held an adventure board, cards, playing pieces, two pizza boxes and five glasses. Only a moment ago, the white die had been lying beside the board, innocent, angular and statistically reliable.

Now it was gone.

Jen lifted the cards. She looked under the rulebook, beneath the napkins and even under the slice of pizza Roxy had been planning to eat "in a minute" for the past ten minutes.

Nothing.

Where the die had been, only a round impression remained in the dusting of crumbs. The fact that a cube-shaped object had left a circular mark made the case immediately more suspicious.

"Did someone take it?" Ruby asked.

Everyone said no.

Pinky sat on the windowsill washing one paw.

Jen pulled her beanie lower. She was competitive when she played. As it now turned out, she was competitive when she investigated too.

"Nobody leaves the table," she said.

Mina raised her cocoa. "I'm sitting on the sofa."

"Nobody leaves the room."

"Better."

Jen placed her notebook beside the game board.

The cosy evening was over. The committee of inquiry began its work.

I. The Suspects

Six people were present and therefore, by Jen's first estimate, there were six suspects.

Lena had a motive. She was in last place and needed a six to cross the mountain pass. Roxy had opportunity; she had briefly disappeared beneath the table to retrieve an olive. Nika possessed technical expertise and denied that this was relevant to an analogue die, which Jen recorded as a precaution.

Ruby had handed out the pizza. Mina had the best view of the room. Jen herself had rolled most recently.

"What about Pinky?" Roxy asked.

Everyone looked towards the windowsill.

Pinky closed her eyes.

"Witness," said Jen.

"Why not a suspect?"

"She has no discernible motive."

Pinky opened one eye and studied the playing pieces.

Jen amended her statement. "No discernible motive yet."

She handed out small playing pieces as temporary identification badges. Everyone had to place theirs somewhere visible. Mina put hers on the back of the sofa. Pinky received none. Instead, she occupied Jen's closed rulebook.

"This hearing is now in session," Jen said.

II. The Last Sighting

The die had last been seen at eight fourteen p.m.

Lena had rolled a three. Roxy's turn had been next, but first she had searched for the olive. Ruby opened the second pizza box. Nika explained a rule no one had questioned. Mina got up to refill her cocoa. Jen shuffled the event cards.

In those two minutes, the die disappeared.

"Who touched the table?" Jen asked.

Every hand went up.

"That doesn't help."

They reconstructed the seating plan. Lena to the left of the board, Ruby to the right, Roxy opposite. Nika beside the cola bottle. Jen at the head of the table. Mina two metres away on the sofa, although her effective reach could never be assessed reliably due to the red sofa button.

Pinky had initially been by the window. At least, that was what everyone believed. No one could say when she had moved onto the rulebook.

Jen drew a timeline. A dark area appeared between eight fourteen and eight sixteen.

She asked everyone to write down their memories to the exact second. Lena produced a table. Ruby drew the pizza box. Roxy wrote: olive gone, knee table, music somewhere. Mina returned a blank sheet and explained that she had not concerned

herself with the clock during those two minutes.

Nika's phone photograph was the most helpful. It showed the table at eight fourteen and thirty-seven seconds. The die was visible in it, half hidden behind the cola bottle. Pinky's tail also appeared in the reflection on the glass.

"She was already at the table," Jen said.

Pinky continued washing as though timestamps were a human eccentricity.

"Two minutes," Jen said. "Everything happened inside them."

Mina drank her cocoa. "Or nothing. The die is small."

Jen wrote that down too.

III. The Evidence

There were traces beneath the lamp.

A fingerprint in tomato sauce on the game board. Two petrol-blue hairs on a card. A grain of glitter beside the cola bottle. A fresh nick in the table. Three crumbs carrying different levels of seasoning.

Every clue implicated at least three people and cleared no one.

The tomato print probably belonged to Ruby, Roxy or the pizza. The hairs most likely came from Jen, but might have been there for days. The glitter matched both Roxy's eye shadow and an event card featuring a sparkling dragon. The nick was older than it looked.

Jen placed each clue on a separate napkin.

Pinky jumped from the rulebook onto the table. She sniffed the tomato print, sat on the napkin holding the hairs and swatted once at the speck of glitter.

"The witness is tampering with the scene," Lena said.

Jen gently lifted Pinky down. Pinky immediately jumped back up.

The committee met behind closed bowls of crisps. The public, consisting of nobody but Pinky,

showed little respect for the proceedings.

Jen numbered the napkins. Exhibit one was the tomato print, two the hairs and three the glitter. Exhibit four was meant to be the nick, but the table would not fit on a napkin. Lena drew it to scale instead.

Ruby brought over a small desk lamp. Under the angled light, a fine trail gleamed in the crumb dust. It led from the die's original position towards the rulebook and stopped abruptly there.

"A rolling track," said Jen.

Nika bent closer. "Or someone dragged a finger through the crumbs."

Pinky stretched and drew a second parallel track with her paw.

The gathering of evidence became more difficult.

IV. The First Search

Jen began under the table.



Armed with a torch and her notebook, she crawled between the chair legs. She found a coin, three playing cards from three different games, a long-lost earring and enough pizza crumbs to form an expansion pack of their own.

No die.

Roxy shone a light from the other side. Lena lifted the chairs one at a time. Nika photographed the floor so she could place a grid over it later. Ruby discovered that the earring belonged to her and had been missing since February.

"The evening is already a success," she said.

Jen examined the skirting boards. A die could roll, bounce and vanish beneath furniture. It could not, however, leave the room without assistance.

Under the sofa, Mina found two hair ties, a spoon and a red button which, to be safe, she did not

press.

Pinky watched the search from the table. Her tail struck the pizza box at a measured pace.

"Has anyone looked inside the box?" Jen asked.

Ruby opened it.

Only pizza.

The investigation grew hungrier, but no wiser.

Jen crawled beneath the table a second time, now following the calculated rolling direction. The torch beam slid over wood, dust and lost game pieces. Behind one table leg she found a small scratch at die height.

She placed the spare die at the starting point and nudged it. It missed the scratch. It missed again on the second attempt. Only when Roxy touched the table at the same moment did the course change.

"The furniture was involved," Jen concluded.

Mina looked over from the sofa. "Are you going to question it too?"

Jen knocked on the table leg. It responded with a dull sound.

"Refuses to testify," she said, and wrote it down.

V. The Statements

Jen questioned everyone separately.

Lena stated with precision that during the relevant period she had been reading page twelve of the instructions. It contained nothing useful, which lent credibility to her account.

Roxy admitted that she had never found the olive. Instead, she had discovered a playing piece under the table and put it back. She could no longer remember which one.

Ruby explained that both her hands had been occupied by pizza. Tomato sauce confirmed this to an impressive degree.

Nika pointed out that a die left no digital trace. Jen noted how unusually quickly she had said it.

Mina remembered a faint clack. "Maybe the die. Maybe a cup."

"From which direction?"

Mina gestured generally at the room.

Pinky was questioned last. Jen sat down before her and placed a game token on the floor.

"Did you see anything?"

Pinky touched the token with one paw and pushed it beneath the shelf.

Jen watched it disappear.

"That is either a clue or a threat."

Next, Jen placed a white sugar cube in front of Pinky to test her reaction. Pinky sniffed it and turned away. The blue spare die received a swipe of the paw. A round wooden bead was immediately pushed under the shelf.

"She prefers things that move," Lena said.

"Everything moves if Pinky is interested enough," said Mina.

Jen tested different sizes and materials. Five minutes later, tokens lay all over the room, Pinky sat contentedly in the middle, and the committee had proved that cats enjoyed shoving things. The finding was scientifically robust and almost useless to the actual search.

VI. The Bounce Theory

Nika reconstructed the die's final movement.

They fetched a spare from another game. It was blue, slightly larger and therefore only conditionally comparable. Jen marked the original position. Lena repeated her throw.

The blue die rolled into the cola bottle, bounced sideways and stopped beside the board.

On the second attempt it struck the foot of the bottle at a different angle, ricocheted off a playing piece and fell from the table. It came to rest beneath the sofa.

On the third attempt it shot straight into the pizza box.

Everyone looked at Ruby.

She opened the box again. The spare die lay on a slice of salami.

"That only proves dice like pizza," she said.

Jen inspected the box more thoroughly. No second bump, no mark in the cheese, no white die.

On the fourth attempt, Pinky intercepted the blue die with her paw.

Silence.

Pinky held it for a moment, then pushed it off the table.

"New motive," said Jen.

They repeated the experiment at a lower speed. Pinky caught the die again. The third time, she let it pass and swatted at the playing piece instead. On the fourth, she sat down on the marked starting point so that no throw could take place.

"The behaviour is inconsistent," said Nika.

"The behaviour is cat," said Mina.

Jen drew three arrows in her notebook. One ended beneath the rulebook, one on the floor and one directly beside Pinky. The routes did not contradict one another. They merely showed that Pinky did not recognise repeatable experimental conditions.

VII. The Cat in the Minutes

Pinky was officially declared a suspect.

The procedure required identification. Jen placed a small cat-shaped playing piece in front of her. Pinky sniffed it, knocked it over and sat on it.

"Identity confirmed," said Nika.

Possible motives were collected: movement stimulus, playfulness, disapproval of unclear rules, a general claim to everything that rolled. Pinky had opportunity at all times. Her route between window, table and sofa had not been documented.

In her favour, no one had heard the sound of rolling. The die was also absent from the usual feline hiding places: rug, shelf, curtain or Mina's blanket.

Jen searched Pinky's collar, basket and favourite cardboard box. Pinky followed her and watched every movement with increasing indignation.

The box contained a hair tie, a paper star and one dried pea.

"Confiscated property," said Mina.

The die was not among it.

Pinky jumped onto Jen's chair and curled up.

The prime suspect fell asleep during questioning.

Jen regarded her with the uncomfortable feeling that a sleeping cat looked far more innocent than a human with an alibi. Pinky had tucked her front

paws beneath her chest and was breathing slowly. Not even her whiskers gave anything away.

"We could close the case as unsolved," Ruby suggested.

Jen turned towards her.

Ruby raised both hands in surrender. "Just a thought. A bad one. Already gone."

Jen took a tape measure from the games drawer and measured the distance from the table edge to every reachable hiding place. The die could have reached the shelf only at an unusual speed. The curtain lay outside any direct flight path. Under Mina's blanket it would have made an audible clatter, unless Mina's blanket already qualified as a special soundproof zone.

Mina pulled it closer around herself. "It does."

Jen wrote: special zone cannot be inspected.

VIII. The Committee of Inquiry

At ten p.m., the search became a committee.

Jen pinned a sketch of the table to the wall. Threads connected seats, clues and possible rolling routes. Every theory received a colour. Ten minutes later, the wall resembled a map of several unreasonable mountain trails.

Lena kept the minutes. Nika calculated probabilities. Roxy handed out pizza. Ruby guarded the spare dice so the case would not become any larger.



Mina requested a recess.

"Denied," said Jen.

Mina lay down. "Then I'll take one without authorisation."

The committee examined three hypotheses: the die had fallen; the die had been pocketed by accident; the die was still on the table, but in a place no one regarded as part of the table.

This third theory arose because Pinky was sitting on Jen's notebook.

Jen lifted the cat. There was nothing underneath but the closed book.

Pinky sat on the pizza box.

The committee adjourned for thirty seconds to eat.

Afterwards, they expanded the wall chart. Jen drew the table to scale, insofar as scale remained possible after Roxy enlarged the western game area with a grease stain. Lena numbered the exhibits. The sugar cube received number seven, although nobody knew why it was evidence in the first place. Ruby's olive became number eight and was eaten shortly afterwards.

"Destruction of evidence," said Jen.

"Hunger," said Roxy.

Nika assembled an approximate sequence from two phone photographs. In the first, the die still lay beside Lena's piece. In the second, Jen's hand of cards concealed the spot. In the third, Pinky sat in the middle of the picture and looked so directly into the camera that she might have authorised the photograph herself.

Forty-seven seconds separated image one from image three. Forty-seven seconds in which six people had talked, a cat had jumped, an olive had fallen and a rule had been misunderstood. Jen found that an insultingly large selection of possibilities.

She circled Pinky's silhouette. "We need a second reconstruction."

Pinky opened one eye, closed it again and abstained.

IX. The Second Reconstruction

After the break, they reconstructed the people rather than the roll.

Everyone took their original position. Ruby opened the box. Roxy dived after the olive. Nika explained the rule. Mina went to fetch cocoa. Jen shuffled the cards. Lena placed the spare die where the original had been.

Then they moved in slow motion.

Roxy's knee nudged the table. The cola bottle wobbled. The die rolled two centimetres. Jen's stack of cards pushed it farther. Pinky jumped from the window onto the table.

Her paw landed directly beside the die.

"Stop," said Jen.

Everyone froze.

Pinky, naturally, did not. She walked across the board, sat on the rulebook and yawned.

The spare die had vanished.

"Not again," said Ruby.

Jen lifted the rulebook. The blue die lay underneath.

Pinky had pushed it there with her paw.

Now they knew the method. Only the white die's final location remained unknown.

X. The False Discovery

The search concentrated on flat objects.

Rulebooks were shaken, decks divided and napkins unfolded. Inside the lid of the pizza box they found a white die.

Jen lifted it out in triumph.

It had letters instead of pips.

"From the word game," said Lena.

No one knew how it had entered the pizza box. The find was set aside as irrelevant to the proceedings.

Beneath one card lay a sugar cube. Beside the cola bottle they found a small cube of cheese. Lin came in briefly, heard only "looking for a cube" and brought a wooden block from the workshop.

The table filled with false dice.

Pinky watched them closely.

Jen arranged the finds in a row: letter die, sugar cube, cheese cube, wooden block and the blue spare die. It was a small parade of misleading geometry. Roxy wanted to give them names. Lena forbade it because, in her experience, named exhibits could no longer be thrown away.

The wooden block was too large. The cheese cube too soft. The sugar was already dissolving at the edges. Only the letter die was about the right size, but none of its faces carried pips. Jen turned it

until the letters S, I and X were uppermost.

"Almost six," said Nika.

"This committee is getting tired," Lena observed.

Pinky reached out one paw and nudged the sugar cube. It slid into Jen's notebook and came to rest against the back edge of the cover.

Jen paused.

She leaned back. Perhaps they had spent too much time searching for an object and too little searching for an action. Pinky did not push things far. She pinned them down, concealed them or sat on them.

Jen looked at the notebook.

It lay open. Pinky was no longer sitting on it.

XI. Beneath the Statement

Jen turned back to the first page.

Her notes began with the timeline. Beneath it she had listed the suspects. The pages felt thicker than usual.

She picked up the book and shook it.

Nothing fell out.

Pinky jumped onto the table, placed one front paw on the paper and looked at Jen.

"May I?" Jen asked.

Pinky lifted her paw.

There was a small bulge beneath it. Jen ran a finger over the spot. Something hard was lodged between the cover and the pages.

She opened the pocket inside the back cover.

The white die rolled out.

It showed a six.

Jen held the book at an angle. The pocket was meant for loose papers and stood open by a few millimetres along its lower edge. Just wide enough for a die, if a heavy rulebook pressed it against the lip. A pale trail of paper dust crossed the cover. It ran from the table edge to the opening.

Jen had been holding the most important piece of evidence all evening. She had used it to record timelines, question witnesses and watch suspects. At one point, she had even placed the notebook on

the diagram of the die's possible routes without noticing the weight inside it.

"The investigator was the crime scene," Nika said quietly.

Roxy bit her lip, managed three seconds and then laughed so loudly that Pinky's ears turned.

Jen looked at the notebook, then at the wall full of arrows and finally at the small white die. "That does not go in the minutes."

Lena raised her pen. "It is already in the minutes."

For one moment, nobody said anything. Then Roxy applauded. Ruby raised a slice of pizza. Lena closed the record.

Pinky sat on Jen's hand and began to purr.

"She didn't steal it," said Mina. "She confiscated it."

Jen looked at the cat. "For unclear game rules?"

Pinky purred more loudly.

XII. The Verdict

The committee reached the following conclusion:

The die had left its original position through a combination of a table nudge, card movement and feline paw. Pinky had pushed it beneath the rulebook. When Jen later placed the book on her notebook, the die had slipped into the pocket in its cover.

No theft. No sabotage. Negligent custody with feline involvement.

The committee further determined that Jen's notebook must in future be searched before any investigation began. Jen objected to this addition. Lena recorded the objection and wrote beside it: dismissed due to overwhelming evidence.

Roxy demanded the olive be officially cleared. Ruby demanded the same for the pizza. Nika asked for the record to omit the fact that she had mentioned digital traces "too quickly". Mina demanded nothing; she had long since retreated beneath her blanket and regarded the resolution of the case as a sufficient end to the working day.

Pinky was cautioned for lack of remorse. The caution had no discernible effect.

Jen amended the house rule: dice would henceforth be kept in a bowl. Pinky received her own place beside the game board and a soft felt ball she was officially permitted to confiscate.

Lena's original roll was restored. Three. She remained stranded before the mountain pass.

"The die shows a six now," Roxy pointed out.

"Evidence cannot be reinterpreted retroactively," said Jen.

The game could continue.

Finale - A New Round

Pinky was officially allowed to roll.

The rule was simple: Jen placed the die before her, Pinky pushed it from the table, and the result on the floor counted. On the first attempt, she rolled a six. On the second, another six. On the third, six again.

Jen looked at the cat for a long time.

Pinky sat motionless with her front paws neatly side by side. Her face displayed nothing but ministerial innocence.

"Statistically conspicuous," said Nika.

"Technically possible," said Lena.

"Very talented," said Roxy.

Jen took the die, examined every side and rolled it herself. Two.

Pinky rolled. Six.



The room fell silent.

Jen opened her notebook to a fresh page. "Nobody leaves the room."

Mina pulled her blanket higher. "Again?"

"Second committee of inquiry."

Pinky jumped onto the notebook and sat exactly on the empty page.

Proceedings were adjourned.