

Day 10

Finally, the magi had reached the long-awaited Christmas bazaar! Caspar could barely contain his excitement as he vaulted off Gary the camel and strode towards the entrance to the Village Hall, sheaf of parchment in one hand, pen in the other.

As he handed over the fifty pence entrance fee to a strict looking Women's Institute member and skipped across the threshold, he was already scribbling "*Initiates are required to furnish authority figures with silver before they are permitted to view the secrets of the bizarre...*"

Melchior tethered up Kevin, Gary and Wayne the camels and helped Balthazar, who was still slightly unsteady on his feet, to the entrance.

"Absolutely no spitting or bellowing!" he called over his shoulder at the camels.

Inside the Village Hall, Melchior recognised some of the Women's Institute members from the arm-wrestling competition at the inn (now he thought about it, he was sure he had seen one or two of them at the darts tournament as well), as well as a lot of the Brownies from the Brownie Camp. They were manning a stall where you had to throw coconuts at tins to win cuddly toys, but on sighting the magi, several of them scurried out to brush the camels.

"Are you alright dearie?" cooed a particularly muscly member of the WI to Balthazar. "You look a bit peaky to me."

"He took a bit of a tumble and hurt his head" said Melchior, as he handed over a mildly bewildered Balthazar to her care.

"Gosh, you poor dear. I'll make you an extra, extra strong cup of tea with five sugars, that's bound to sort you out. I had a fall last winter you know. I distinctly remember it was on a Thursday, because I had just put the bins out on my way to bingo..." Caspar hurried past, frantically noting down "*Burly female offers an infusion of oriental plant products, claims it has healing powers...*"

Safe in the knowledge that Balthazar would be well looked after, Melchior skipped off to enjoy the bazaar. He bought some jingly bells for the camels, seven more strips of raffle tickets (he rather liked the look of some of the prizes) and threw some coconuts at some tins, managing to win a cuddly toy honey-badger. Caspar loitered behind him, scrawling "*Minors encourage initiates to hurl exotic fruit at metal cylinders...*".

"We're about to call the raffle!" called a small, shrill WI member over the hubbub. Melchior carefully arranged all his raffle tickets in front of him so that he could see the numbers. Caspar, who was almost out of parchment, wrote "*Silence descends as some form of ritualised gambling begins.*"

*

A little while later, the three wise men exited the Village Hall in high spirits. Balthazar had indeed been restored to health by the extra-extra strong tea with five sugars. Caspar had managed to record extensive notes, which he had decided to title "*Rites and Rituals of the Christmas Bizarre*" and hoped to publish in the New Year. Melchior had been fantastically lucky in the raffle, winning a poinsettia plant, a large box of chocolate biscuits and a china scotty dog. This final item bore a

partially torn-off label, stating "To Sandie, Happy Christmas, hope you like the present. Love from Bob".

They found Kevin, Gary and Wayne the camels in similarly good moods. The Brownies had not only brushed and braided their fur again, but had bedecked the camels with decorations they had surreptitiously smuggled out of the Christmas bazaar. Once Melchior had presented each camel with a new set of jingly bells, and the raffle prizes had been loaded into the camels' saddle bags, the party set off towards the desert.

Questions

- 1 Who was the first wise man to enter the Christmas bazaar?
 - a Balthazar
 - b Caspar
 - c Melchior
- 2 What is the total amount the three wise men would have paid to get into the bazaar?
 - a 50p
 - b £1
 - c £1.50p
 - d £350p
 - e £3
- 3 How many characters speak out loud in this passage?
 - a One
 - b Four
 - c Two
 - d Three
 - e Five
- 4 Aside from the raffle prizes, how many extra items did Melchior gain at the Christmas bazaar?
 - a Five
 - b Four
 - c Three
 - d Two
 - e One
- 5 When the magi left the Village Hall, how were they feeling?
 - a Suspicious
 - b Downcast
 - c Nondescript
 - d Bewildered
 - e Jovial
- 6 As used in the final sentence of the passage, what does the word "party" mean?
 - a Celebration
 - b Faction
 - c Individual
 - d Revelry
 - e Group

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