

The Theory of Exaggerate

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/35981785) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/35981785>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Hermitcraft , Last Life SMP , Hermitcraft SMP
Relationship:	EthosLab & Rendog (Video Blogging RPF) , EthosLab & BdoubleO100 , Rendog & BdoubleO100
Character:	EthosLab (Video Blogging RPF) , BdoubleO100 , Rendog (Video Blogging RPF) , Charles Grian , TangoTek (Video Blogging RPF) , Mumbo Jumbo , Scott Smajor1995 Dangthatsalongname
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Last Life SMP Setting (Video Blogging RPF) , Cults , griefing , Theft , uhh murder i guess , last life is just a game they play here , death is non-permanant and if they die on red they just leave the server, so not really angst , weird spin-off cults?
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-12-26 Words: 6,186 Chapters: 1/1

The Theory of Exaggerate

by [Interjection](#)

Summary

It began when Ren and Bdubs decided to start a cult.

Now, in the grand scheme of things that have happened in their Last Life games, a cult was no big deal. But Etho found the rituals of this one to be just a bit stranger than usual.

Notes

Written for the NHO Discord 2021 Secret Santa.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The Boogeyman is about to be chosen in 5...4...3...2...1...

“Where are all my sheep?”

Uh oh, was Etho’s first thought. *It’s the first day and thefts are already happening.*

Now that was, in itself, not particularly unusual. Stuff went missing a *lot* in these games.

But Scar sounded a bit more panicked than usual. Etho watched from his perch among the trees as he scrambled through his raggedy moss-cave of a base, the surrounding dark oak forests, and for some reason even his *barrels* to try and locate this elusive flock of sheep.

Eventually, Etho decided to stop being internally amused in his hiding spot and start being externally amused instead.

He jumped down from the branches.

Scar paused his activities with a start when Etho *thudded* quietly into the leaves behind him. When he abruptly whirled, a look of scandalized surprise overcame his face.

“*You!*” he cried. “Etho, you sneaky scoundrel! Did you take my delicious - uh - precious sheep? They were very important to my wellbeing, you know, and I think you should definitely-”

“I didn’t take your sheep, Scar,” Etho said, holding up his hands. “Sorry. But why were you trying to find them in your barrels?”

Scar blinked. “Oh! In that case, have you maybe seen a flock of beautiful, recently-relocated sheep around here? Prime woolly coats, deliciously lustrous meat - ah, I mean, healthily lustrous bodies?”

“I can’t say I have,” Etho replied, which *was* the truth of the matter. He decided to not push the barrel question any further. There was only so much delight one could wrangle out of making fun of Scar without feeling bad, even after all these seasons. “Your house looks nice, by the way.”

Scar quickly perked up. “Really? You think so? I really wanted to try a base with a mostly moss-texture, you know. Have my own little cave. It’s like halfway underground and halfway above, see? And oh, the way the back of it conjoins with these trees as the perfect base of support - I’m very fond of finishing the back of my bases, as you know. It’s so important to structure, and of course it ties the *feeling* of the place together. I don’t think a base can really be finished if someone has to look at the back and be subjected to - oh, I don’t know, a horrendously empty mess? Say, by the way, I would consider myself quite the expert on finishing the back of bases. If you need a service like that, any service at all, don’t hesitate to find me! And I’ll barter the price right at the negotiations. Isn’t that nice? Scar’s Back of Base Building Business - open and ready, come any time-”

“I... sorry, but think I’m good for now,” Etho said. Briefly he advanced forward, before changing his mind and inching away instead. “Not quite the audience you might be looking for when it comes to the back of bases. Good luck with those sheep, Scar.” This must be a new record for how fast Scar’s pitched a “business.” Or maybe that llama breeding service in Season 5 still topped the chart - he’s not sure. To this day no one knew just how Scar acquired those llamas so fast.

“Oh, thank you so much for stopping by, Etho!” Scar called brightly to Etho’s retreating back. “I’m sure if you find those sheep, you’ll tell me *exactly* where they are *right away*, right?”

Ah, there was that classic Scar blend of endearing and vaguely threatening. Etho didn’t break pace - he also pretended he didn’t hear that last bit. Plausible deniability was his greatest tool.

Also, Scar had quite a bit of nerve, rambling about finishing a base’s back to the one person known for never building exteriors in the first place.

“All the cows are gone again!”

Etho raised an eyebrow as Tango paced around the dug-out cave, a single birch door the barrier between them and the night full of mobs.

“Gone as in you *had* them, or...”

“I went to look for some earlier,” Tango said, furrowing his eyebrows. “And I thought the lands would be overflowing with them, y’know, because they’re *cows*. But I can’t find any and according to Gem, Scott, and Martyn’s groups, they can’t find any either!”

Etho hummed. It *was* strange, actually, now that he thought about it - during the entire day, he hadn’t caught sight of a single passive mob beyond some salmon in the rivers. Maybe a bat or two in the brief time he went caving.

“It’s the first day, like you pointed out,” he said. “How would anyone have time...”

They all spawned on the bedrock podium this season. Everyone exchanged some banter and light threats for the first hour or two before the game properly “began.” With around 20 people participating this season, it’s not unreasonable to assume someone might have slipped away unnoticed and done something in that timeframe.

Etho turned memories over in his head. Who doesn’t he remember being at the spawn meeting?

Hm. Interesting. He stood up and unsheathed his sword - iron, and unenchanted. Tango stiffened.

“Oh, don’t worry, Tango.” Etho walked to the door and turned the handle. “I just have some more things to take care of. The first session’s important, remember? We only have a week to get what we want done before the break.”

Tango relaxed again, and nodded. “Well, good luck. And if you happen to find some cows - sheep or pigs work too, since they’re also missing - could you perhaps... come back and work out a deal with me?”

Now here’s a man with a trustworthy business. As trustworthy as things got in this series, anyway.

Etho offered a smile. “I’ll see what I can do, Tango.”

The night was spent mining for more materials. Most people had a rough idea of where they wanted to settle their bases by now, but Etho decided to hold off on that. He had a few more things to do that were distinctly *not* base-building, thank you very much, Scar.

He arose from the immense caverns with the sun also peeking through the horizon. It’s still an usual experience to someone as old as Etho - all those years of caving in the previous terrain had been completely upended by the new generation.

Despite the update having been, technically, a while ago, Etho just couldn’t get the idea of *new* out of his mind. The universe marched on, he supposed.

While traveling back to spawn, Etho came across Scott, Grian, and Pearl.

“So you three are teaming together this season?” Etho asked. He had to strain his neck to see the very top of the twisty birch tower - and seriously, they decided to use birch *logs* for this build? With... diorite accents? Thank Mojang Iskall was too busy with the newest season of Vault Hunters to join this time.

“It’s our intimidation tower!” Grian shouted down. His voice was just faint enough to be heard; Etho’s impressed he can shout that far. “It’s so ugly no one will want to set foot in it!”

That must have hurt Grian and Pearl to build. Scott’s idea, then. It did have a nice shape to it.

Etho considered asking for entry - it’s always good to keep enemies close in this game, and right now pretty much everyone was an enemy. That’s how these games always seemed to always go - enemies to friends to enemies again. But his business wasn’t with them, so he decided to let it be and call back, “Alright! I’ll get going now!”

His ears picked up on some faint discussion between the three as he retreated back into the trees. Something about “plans” and “cows.” Were they suspecting *Etho* as the reason everyone had to rely on baked potatoes and fish for food right now? That’s funny.

Etho snagged all the sugarcane around the small lake right beside the tower as he left.

There’s an awful lot of birch this season - flat birch forest, hilly birch forest, mountainous birch forest, birch forest in mountain valleys. A line running through spawn marked where the birch turned to dark oak and shattered savannah - or, well - not really *shattered* savannah, because that biome didn’t exist anymore. But the generation was close enough.

Etho picked his way back to spawn, encountering surprisingly few mobs. Just a few surviving skeletons, and no creepers or spiders.

For this season, there was already an enchanting table at spawn, pre-generated. There was also a rule that no one could take the enchanting table into their inventory.

When Etho arrived there, a massive castle fort of granite and acacia blocked his sight. Or - wait. The castle *encased* spawn.

“What is it with you and castles?” Etho asked as Ren... *marches* through the small gateway.

“It’s the Castle Exaggeratrix,” Ren said, looking down from the hill to meet his eyes. “Bow before its majesty.”

Etho blinked again. “The what?”

“You must bow-”

“Where in the universe did you get that name from?” Etho asked. “I thought you were all about *Rencastles* and *Renforts* and *Rencaves* - Exaggeratrix doesn’t fit the bill.”

Ren flushed. “It - it came to me in a dream, okay? He - he said I should build some great big walls and name it Exaggeratrix in honor of Exaggeratrix and keep out all the - the people.”

“Who?” Etho asked, now genuinely intrigued. Ren had a propensity for dramatics, but this time something felt different.

Ren twisted his head into his shoulder, almost as if to hide his face, and mumbled something so quiet even Etho couldn’t hear.

“I didn’t hear you.”

Ren mumbled something again, and then sighed, saying louder: “Doc.”

Etho couldn’t help himself; he bursted out laughing.

“Doc?”

“Yes, okay!” Ren took a step back up towards his castle and Etho followed the movement, climbing the hill spawn sat atop as well. “He said - well, wait! I don’t have to tell you what he said!”

“What who said?” Bdubs poked his head from the entrance of the... *Castle Exaggeratrix*. “Woah! Etho!”

“Yes,” Etho said, continuing his climb. “Quite the interesting castle you guys have here. I’m sure you wouldn’t mind giving me a tour.”

“Now, now,” Ren said, reaching the entrance and physically splaying his arms out across the opening as if to deter Etho. “Come on. This is a strictly *no* visitors allowed zone-”

“You can’t take the enchanting table,” Etho pointed out.

“We can’t *break* enchanting table and put it in our inventory,” Bdubs shot back, scuttling around just behind Ren. “Nothin’ ever said about guarding it from other people.”

Etho paused, and then had to grudgingly admit internally that they do have a point. It’s technically not in the rules.

He reached Ren, and finally stood face to face with him. It’s funny, how squirmy Ren gets when staring right into Etho’s eyes.

But the goal here wasn’t to intimidate Ren - that’s just a nice bonus. With a shrug, Etho ducked beneath Ren’s arms, smooth as a salmon in a stream, and found himself inside Castle Exaggeratrix.

“Well,” Etho said. “What do we have here?”

A cage of chains, iron bars, and...lightning rods? - surround the enchanting table. Above it all was a giant spire of a fence post, and attached to the fence post were several leads.

Two cows, pigs, chickens, and sheep were attached to the leads, milling around inside the cage. Etho hid a mild noise of disgust at the smell of mob everyone will now have to endure if they want to enchant.

“It’s not what you think it is,” Bdubs cried. “I swear, we’re-”

“Have you guys been the ones killing all the food around the server?” Etho asked.

“Um-

“Doc said we had to please the Exaggeratrix-”

Etho cleared his throat, and casually slipped an arm around Bdubs’ shoulders. The man shivered slightly beneath the gesture. “Let me ask this again. *Were you two the reason I’ve eaten nothing but fish since the beginning of the session.* ”

He topped the question with a smile, though it’s not visible through his mask. The message was conveyed anyway - Ren took a step back.

“Um. I-”

“Yes!” Bdubs blurted out, and quickly wriggled away from Etho’s arm to scramble up beside Ren. “Uh - but it was for a good cause, see! They said mobs were bad - land mobs! Land mobs are bad! So we’re getting rid of them - didn’t you notice how *safe* you were coming here? Got rid of all those pesky spiders and creepers, we did - hey! What are you doing?”

“Nothing, nothing,” Etho said, closing the lid of the barrel. He had seen nearly three stacks of gunpowder in there - with this much in one night, one of them probably had a looting weapon. Time to be on the lookout, but he didn’t want to blatantly steal such a powerful resource just yet. Besides, he had something far more valuable in his mind now.

“Doesn’t look like nothin’-”

“So where might you have kept all that leather and food everyone wants, hm?” Etho asked. “I talked to some people about it, you know. They’re all very angry at whoever made their livestock disappear.” He smiled. “I admit it’s a neat little magic trick.”

“Well, um - you know, man.” Ren laughed, never sounding more nervous in his life. Etho sauntered over to another pile of chests against the granite wall and began rifling through them. Random things - dirt, cobble, coal. Ah, this delightful rule about not being able to kill without provocation as a non-red. He himself has two lives, so he does have to be a bit more careful than usual - but still.

Bdubs and Ren were both dark green. This is what Scar would call a prime business opportunity.

“I imagine people would be very angry if they found out what you’ve done here,” Etho said. “How do you plan to hide the evidence?”

“Um-” Bdubs and Ren glanced at each other, and then at the strange cage they’ve made around the enchanting table and mobs.

“We’re just waiting for a signal,” Ren said.

“And what signal might that be?”

Then a boom of thunder rumbles - and the rain started pouring.

“*That* signal,” Ren said, suddenly grinning wildly, gazing into the dark sky above. He raised his arms, as if bizarrely beseeching the thunderstorm, and called, “Oh, thunder! Oh, Exaggeratrix, our great overlord! Come and show us your favor-”

Etho jumped back as a giant blast of blinding lightning almost knocked them all off their feet. His ears rang, his eyes-

Oh, great. He’s going to be dizzying for the next few minutes. That’s not good-

Though, Etho noticed through the swirling pain that this entire time, neither Ren nor Bdubs had brought up the idea of him or them being the Boogeyman. Interesting. Were they planning something? It’s possible the entire “Exaggeratrix” thing was a ruse.

“YES!” Bdubs’ dim figure soared into the air and back down, fist pumping. “IT WORKED!”

When Etho’s vision finally cleared enough of the white, he suddenly realized that the lightning had struck the cage - and of course it did. The cage is made partially of lightning rods.

And also, the thunderstorm was gone - disappearing as abruptly as it came.

There were now pieces of leather, cooked meats, and two very confused looking zombie piglins in the cage. As well as fire. Ren broke through the bars, carefully gathered up all the items, and then - tossed them into the fire as well?

“What are you doing?” Etho asked, now completely baffled. That’s perfectly good food.

Bdubs puffed up his cheeks. “Well, you asked where the food was. Well, there they are! In the fire!”

In a rare moment of slowness, it took Etho a good ten seconds to process this information.

“So you guys mean to tell me,” he finally began. “That you killed all the mobs in this area, collected their drops... and then *threw them in a fire.*”

“Now he gets it!” Bdubs said, eyes alighting.

“Not just any fire!” Ren added. “The Exaggeratrix fire! It only counts as one if you light this bedrock on fire, see?” He points at the bedrock surrounding the enchantment table.

Etho took another step forward. “You guys are going to be in very hot trouble once I tell everyone about this,” he said.

Ren paled. Etho’s never seen someone turn an expression so quickly. “Uh - you know, we didn’t - you shouldn’t-”

Bdubs tugs at Ren’s sleeve. “What did the Exaggeratrix say about this?” he whispered.

“They didn’t say anything about Etho blackmailing us!” Ren whispered back.

A normal player wouldn’t be able to hear them. Funny how everyone remembered that Etho wasn’t normal, but never what that really entailed.

“It’s okay, because *I* can say something about it,” Etho said pleasantly. Ren stiffened. Bdubs looked about ready to jump into the air from fright again.

“How about-” Etho hummed. “A life? From both of you.”

“From *both* of us!” Bdubs cried. “What - are you trying to *scam* us? There’s been nothing in Last Life worth *two* lives, you know-”

“There was that one time in Season 4 where Scar gave Scott two lives for a guarantee he would protect him for the whole season,” Etho said. That had been right in the middle of what they called the “Scott win-streak.”

“Well-”

“Come on. You guys can afford it - you’re on dark green! And I’m just a poor little yellow.” Etho allowed another grin to wrinkle his eyes. “It would be such a shame if I died and - oh, I don’t know - happen to go looking for a good source of gunpowder to steal-”

“Okay, okay!” Bdubs took out his communicator and began typing frantically.

“Bdubs-” Ren frowned.

“He’s stressing me out, Ren! He’s scaring me! I don’t want to do this anymore-”

With that familiar thrill of a broken totem, Etho felt himself gain another life. Bdubs was almost shivering - did Etho's threat really scare him that much? Huh.

He turned to Ren. "Come on - you're on dark green, Ren. It's a good investment - though you might want to get rid of the evidence too." Etho nodded towards the zombie piglins.

Ren swallowed, and then took out his communicator. "Fine. But this never leaves your mouth, okay? No one else will ever know it was us."

"Of course, of course," Etho said.

It's funny, he thought as he felt another life attach to him - if Ren and Bdubs had denied all involvement in the disappearances and simply claimed they had found the mobs in the wild for breeding early on, Etho wouldn't have had enough evidence to prove them wrong. He might have even believed them to some extent.

And oh, that's interesting. Ren was light green now.

"Well," Etho said brightly. "I'm going to be using the enchanting table now."

"What? We've already said no visitors allowed-" Ren moved to stop him, but Etho slipped past him just as easily as the last time and began tearing down more of the cage.

"We can't - the Exaggeratrix-"

"I'm sure you can make an exception for me." Etho yawned as he took off his helmet and approached the enchanting table, though careful to keep a hand on his sword.

"Unbelievable," Bdubs muttered. "Absolutely unbelievable."

Etho hid a snort. They're one to talk about that kind of behavior.

There were some questions in chat about Ren's sudden delegation to a light green, but Etho's newly dark green status answered that soon enough. And, as per the deal, Etho kept quiet about the details.

This was day two. Besides this, there were five more days left before they end the session and wait another week or two before coming back. Five more days for the Boogeyman - or Boogeymen - to strike.

Etho chopped down some trees, killed some more salmon, and munched on some baked potatoes he had borrowed from Jimmy and BigB's shack a while back. He also couldn't help noticing the unnaturally large swathes of torched land, but he decides it's not worth his time to break them.

He should go into the Nether get some potions soon. The prospect was now far less daunting with four lives instead of two.

He spent the rest of the day looting other people's bases, however. There's plenty of time for the Nether yet. And as the moon rises above the Last Life lands, Etho carves out a small cave underground, hides the entrance with smooth stone, and stores all his items.

A particular strangeness of this season, brought about by the lack of sheep, and thus wool, was that no one can set their spawn. There's no beds, and also a peculiar lack of spiders. Everyone will have to be careful about how easily their hidden resources could be accessed in case of death.

In that way, Ren and Bdubs really were genius to build their base of operations around spawn. They'd respawn right at home.

Etho spent the rest of night two caving and smelting. It never hurt to stock up on better gear - in the process he even got five diamonds, though without leather the idea of making another enchanting table was moot. He crafted a sword and a pickaxe instead.

When day came once more, Etho clambered out of his little hidden base and carefully hid the entrance. Then he went scouting across the land for the locations of everyone once more.

This season was turning out, it seems, to be a very solo operation for him.

The sun's barely left the horizon's touch when Etho paused, glanced around the windy savannah he's crossing, and tilted his head up.

"Etho! Oh, thank goodness, Etho-" Etho blinked as Scar fell out of the tree above and face-planted into the dirt.

"Hello," Etho said.

"Hello, Etho! The worst thing happened to me-" Scar waved his arms around vaguely, to which Etho averted his eyes because Scar also didn't have his shirt on again and he really didn't want to see any more of those... muscles.

"What is it?" Etho asked.

"Bdubs and Ren!"

Ah. Of course.

"Etho, oh Etho - they came by, and they said the entirety of the Last Life lands is the property of the - the Exeggutor or something like that! And then - can you *believe* this, Etho - they said I had to pay *taxes!*"

Etho began walking again, and Scar kept up pace beside him without hesitation. The dirt was loose, grass crunchy, almost like gravel. There's an unusual dryness to the savannah today. He keeps his eyes peeled around, somewhat futilely, to see if Bdubs and Ren might have missed any mobs.

But no. Not even a few stray horses. The dusty plains were empty save for tinder grass and a few lone trees - the few that hadn't been cut down to build that Castle Exaggeratrix, anyway.

This savannah would be a terrible place for anyone trying to hide, Etho mused to himself.

"...and then, when I rightfully told them that I, poor Scar, have had my sheep stolen and my honor slighted and my mind very disturbed by these words they've told me, they said this - this Exeggutor thing wanted payment. So they burned down my moss-cave!"

"That's unfortunate," Etho said. That moss-cave *had* been pretty cute, he'd give it that.

"I know! So I had to make back everything I'd lost - you know, with the sheep and cave and all the stuff I'm pretty sure they also stole. So I offered them the services of Scar's Back of Base Building Business. I'd spent all night making business cards too, so I gave some to them - and they threw *that* into the fire as well! I am definitely giving them a negative review after this. Didn't even give me the compensation cookies I asked for."

“We don’t have any jungles this season,” Etho pointed out.

“True! But they could have made pumpkin-seed cookies. Or carrot cookies - I’m very partial to carrot cookies. And carrot cake - say, Etho, would you happen to have any carrots on you?”

“Well-” Etho fished around his inventory and gave Scar a single carrot. “Here you go.”

He had to admit, he did feel a little bad for Scar. No one could help it - Scar just had that natural aura about him that made people like him. Maybe it’s because of the vex magic.

It’s probably because of the vex magic.

But nonetheless, Etho couldn’t help but smile when he saw Scar’s expression light up.

“Thanks, Etho!” he said, grinning. “I think I’m going to become a carrot farmer this season. Wouldn’t that be nice? Scar’s Carrot Cultivating Curation and Collection. Stop by anytime - um. When I have a base worked out, that is.”

Etho laughed. “Sure. I’ll see when I can stop by this new base of yours.” Then a thought strikes him, and he paused. “Say, Scar. Would you happen to have any wool?”

“Oh - yeah!” Scar held out said wool, black and fluffy. “I got five wool out of those sheep before they were stolen. These two were left over after I made my bed.”

“Could I...”

A laugh. “Of course, Etho! After you’ve so generously given me that carrot.” Scar tossed Etho the two wool, and he took them with a grin.

“Well,” Etho said. “This has been a very profitable meeting for the both of us.”

Scar nodded furiously. “Of course! And I think I should go make that farm now!” With a sudden urgency, he began running back towards the distant birch forest his base had once been.

Etho watched him go for a few moments, and then turned back to the lifeless savanna.

“Wait, so - you’ve *all* been taxed?” Etho asked, blinking.

“I’m pretty sure you’re the only one they haven’t come knocking on the door of,” Impulse said. Gem nodded in agreement.

“They came in the middle of the night too,” Lizzie complained. “Right as I was trying to get comfortable on some moss because for *some* reason all the sheep are gone, so no one can get a comfortable night’s sleep around here.”

Etho’s pretty good at toughing out several days without sleep, but most players aren’t. Beds made of things beside wool weren’t exactly the most comfortable headrests in the world.

He now had two wool and three strings in his inventory. Not that he’s going to tell them that. But - Etho’s just one or two spiders away from a bed himself. It felt, he dare-thought, rather nice to have some secret upper hands.

“Spiders are scarce around here too,” Impulse sighed. “You’d think they’d spawn better in a savannah, but no.”

“We just have to do more caving,” Gem said. “We’re about half-way there.”

“For enough string to make three wool?” Etho asked.

“Yep.”

They received a hum in reply. A few more minutes of small talk later, Etho decided to take his leave.

Etho spent the day visiting everyone he can think of across the map. Apparently Bdubs and Ren had gone asking for taxes and burning the non-compliants’ bases wherever they went. They’d also been burning down most of the forests.

This Exaggeratrix thing - Doc, or whatever weird version of Doc Ren has conjured up in his dreams - must really like fire. Thankfully, no more thunderstorms had occurred since day two.

“Dude, it’s crazy,” Mumbo said. “I mean, I thought at this point everyone would have been worried about the Boogeyman, but no - all the mobs are gone, all the forests are burning, torch spam is the new fashion, and there’s these - these crazy tax collectors trying to insist we’re living on their property-”

“Technically the Hermitrix - sorry the *Exaggeratrix* property,” Cleo said, sniffing. “We didn’t hand over anything, of course. And our base is made of stone. They lit a few pieces of TNT and ran off.”

“What a waste of TNT too,” Mambo said mournfully. Etho agreed.

“What about you, Etho?” Cleo asked.

“Hm?”

“Have they shown up at your base yet?”

“I don’t have a base,” Etho said, which was... sort of true. He’d stopped back at his little not-a-base cave of resources earlier and put more stuff away, but he didn’t have the final string needed to craft wool, and thus a bed.

It’s not a base.

Mumbo nodded sagely. “The best tax evasion scheme.”

Cleo scoffed. “Next you know, they’re going to be taxing our business transactions. And then what’s next? Use of the enchanting table?”

Ah. So they don’t know.

The terms of the agreement was to not tell everyone who had killed all the mobs on the map. But...

“About that,” Etho said, grinning. “Man, do I have something to tell you two.”

All throughout the third night and fourth day, the news spread. Etho created a little farm of sugarcane, potatoes, and maybe a small creeper farm. Maybe. It’s not terribly efficient - the lack of cats put in some design constraints, as did the need for secrecy - but it works well enough for a few dozen gunpowder an hour. He also slipped back into Castle Exaggeratrix and used the enchanting

table - got quite the nasty enchantment on his new diamond sword. Ren and Bdubs seemed too busy enforcing their newfound tax code to be at their own base.

He also killed some phantoms - screechy things, but rather fascinating. Membranes acquired.

Then Etho came back and went caving.

At some point Impulse, Gem, and Lizzie collected enough string to make a bed. The [Sweet Dreams] achievement popped up in chat; besides Scar, they were the only ones with it. People expressed their jealousy.

On the fifth day, Grian shouted the news about Castle Exaggeratrix's location in the chat. He also complained extensively about all the "stupidly redundant and weird rituals they're doing." It seemed like his group had an encounter while trying to enchant things.

Mumbo also complained in chat a while later.

<MumboJumbo> i dint know if i wan at a ted takl or a cult meting but ahtey hd some scry game si wnat e not part oof!

Some things never change.

Day six passed. No Boogeyman deaths. However, there was a rally in the chat for everyone to temporarily band together and drag Ren and Bdubs out of their base.

It had a lot of support. Etho remained silent on the matter - but he did enter the Nether, gather some blaze rods and potion materials, and come back. He brewed what he could and carefully sorted them into his inventory. That final piece of string came at the death of a strider.

There's a little time left before dark. Carefully, the base was hidden behind more layers of smooth stone, and prettied it up a bit with some moss, azalea bushes, and lichen.

Night settled; Etho clambered into his newly crafted bed, closed his eyes... and allowed himself to fall asleep.

He woke up to the chat in disarray. Following his [Sweet Dreams] achievement, everyone briefly expressed their shock, and then went right back to arguing about Ren and Bdubs.

Those two were really committed to this Exaggeratrix thing, huh?

Etho emerged as day dawned on the seventh day and began making his way towards Castle Exaggeratrix. There's a similar agreement among everyone else to put a stop to Ren and Bdubs' activities once and for all.

He's spent the past few days underground and in the Nether, so only now could he appreciate the sheer scale of everything the two have done - pretty much all the forests have been burnt down. A few saplings have been planted, but for the most part everything is an open desert of dead grass. The fire has even leapt across the world border walls.

There's no mountainous terrain this season. Everything had been forest - and now there's parched grassland. Everyone's bases - the ones aboveground, anyway - were now highly visible.

And so was Castle Exaggeratrix, sitting upon the tallest hill around. Etho had to admit the acacia and granite combination - with the andesite and deepslate highlights - did look quite nice.

<ZombieCleo> *To whoever built that monstrosity of birch logs and diorite: That's the one base I'm glad Bdubs and Ren set on fire.*

<Grian> *rude!*

<PearlescentMoon> *we worked really hard on it >:(*

And of course Scott didn't fess up to it being his idea. Etho chuckled, and continued his journey.

As he neared Castle Exaggeratrix, others came into clear sight. He nodded to Mumbo, Cleo, Jimmy, and Tango. He saw Gem, Lizzie, and Impulse in the distance, along with many other figures.

They met no resistance besides an obsidian barrier at the entrance of the castle. Mumbo towered over it with some dirt and everyone else followed suit.

"So, you two," Cleo said as she leaned herself over the ramparts of the castle. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

The cage around the enchanting table was gone. Instead, the table was now obscured by several barrels. There's a lever on the ground.

Etho had a feeling he knew where this was going. But he kept quiet, like he always did.

"Uh, well-"

"Have you all heard the great word of the Exaggeratrix?" Ren asked, almost yelling. "We - guys, I received a *dream*. A *prophecy*. The being known as the Exaggeratrix spoke to me - they told me - well. We had to, okay? We had to obey the word of-"

"And I, of course, as a loyal believer - like you all should be-" Bdubs coughed. "I had to follow the doctrine, of course-"

"So, all in favor of Ren trying to blame all his mistakes on nightmares?" Grian asked.

A smattering of "yeps" and "ayes" followed him.

Tango stepped forward, close to the edge of the ramparts. Etho found it rather hilarious how they've used the Castle's own geography against Ren and Bdubs - the two had flaunted their high ground every time someone came to enchant. Now they're trapped in the castle courtyard and everyone else was in prime position to jump down and drag them back if they tried to run.

"All in favor of burning Castle Hermitrix to ashes?"

Another chorus of agreement, over Ren's outraged shout of "*It's called Exaggeratrix! Not Hermitrix!*"

"Hey," Martyn said quietly, nudging Jimmy. "*Cahstle Exahggeratrix.*"

Jimmy facepalmed.

"I think Castle Exeggutor is a better name," Scar called down in response. "Say, if you need to build a new base afterwards, call me and we can arrange a deal! Service Scar's Benefiful Build Back Better Base Business-"

"We're not falling for your stupid scams!" Bdubs shouted.

“Is benefitful even a word?” Mumbo whispered to Scott.

“I don’t think so,” Scott whispered back. “I mean, I guess it could count? The -ful ending-”

“Come on, guys,” Grian shouted with narrow eyes, brandishing his sword. “Let’s get our stuff back!”

He jumped into the courtyard of Castle Exaggeratrix, and everyone else streamed down after him.

Except Etho. He waited until he saw the last person - Tango, squinting down at the courtyard, jump. And then he slid himself behind a pillaring log of acacia.

Some ruffling, some arguments about who owned what. And then - “Well, the Exaggeratrix only wants one more sacrifice anyway!” Bdubs exclaimed.

Etho hastily downs a potion of levitation. The flick of a lever clicked through the air-

BdoubleO100 blew up

Renthedog blew up

Grian blew up

GeminiTay blew up

ImpulseSV blew up

InTheLittleWood blew up

...

Everyone lost a life. Except Etho, who after waiting out the explosions in the air, eventually dropped back down.

Pretty much all the items had been destroyed, and what little bits of dirt and wood were left was quickly collected by the mass of players suddenly spawning back on top of the enchanting table.

“*Bdubs* was the Boogeyman?” Impulse cried. A murmur of disbelief rose up again.

“Well,” Etho said, leaning against a tiny, surviving section of the wall. “That was exciting.”

Bdubs whipped to him, eyes wide. “You! You’re supposed to-”

“I didn’t die.” Etho shrugged. “So?”

“But-” Ren somehow still had the audacity to look devastated. “But the Exaggeratrix demanded a life from everyone-”

“Well, I’m very sorry,” Etho said. He brushed past the swarm of still shocked players and stepped up to sling an arm around Ren’s shoulder. “It’s so unfortunate. Though I imagine you’d want to worry about all the new red lives you’ve created first?”

Ren and Bdubs both froze.

“Oh. Uh-” Ren’s eyes darted around as the new red lives - Scott, Pearl, Cleo, and Martyn, turned

their gaze onto him with a newly awoken hunger for vengeance.

“And you only have two lives left,” Etho said, trying to hide his grin. “How unfortunate.”

“Y-yeah.” Ren let out a small laugh. “How unfortunate. Say, Etho - you’re a dark green. But - you know, you were in my position once. You understand me, man. Perhaps you could help a poor yellow out?”

Etho beamed. “Why, of course! I’d be delighted to help take away that yellow.”

Ren’s mouth opened, but the only thing that came out was the tip of Etho’s shimmering diamond sword. His body disappeared a moment later into a puff of pale gray smoke.

Renthedog was slain by Etho

End Notes

Hope you enjoyed, Blue! Tried to stick with you prompt suggestion but I got a bit carried away. Ren and Bdubs certainly learned some lessons though, haha. Thanks for reading <3

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!