

## RQG – 87 – Homeward Bound

### Content Warnings

- X
- X

**BEN**

Hi everyone, Ben here. I'd just like to take a moment to thank some of patrons. Jar Ying Teresa Yu, Mickael Canudsen, Velma, Laura F., Christopher Bloom, Andrew Dix, Brianna Johnson, Christopher Dunn, Shannon Callaghan, April Nash. Thank you all. We really appreciate your support. If you'd like to join them go to [www.patreon.com/rustyquill](http://www.patreon.com/rustyquill) and take a look at our rewards.

**[Show Theme - Intro]**

**ALEX**

Hello and welcome to episode 87 of the Rusty Quill Gaming podcast. I'm your host and GM Alex Newall and with me today, I have

**BEN**

Ben Meredith

**BRYN**

Bryn Monroe

**LYDIA**

Lydia Nicholas

**HELEN**

Helen Gould

**ALEX**

And who are you playing?

**BEN**

Grizzop drik acht Amsterdam

**BRYN**

Hamid Saleh Haroun al-Tahan

**LYDIA**

Sasha Racket, who's asking?

**HELEN**

Azu.

**ALEX**

And we are picking up where we left off. Specifically you have a new friend.

**(cheering)**

Sorry, sorry, what was it? It was you have a new colleague. No! You have a new...

**BRYN**

Workplace proximity acquaintance.

**ALEX**

Workplace acquaintance...

**HELEN**

Lifetime partner.

**ALEX**

Lifetime partner. Live in BFF forever.

**HELEN**

Wife. In general.

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

Contractual arrangement.

**ALEX**

That was it. That was it.

**LYDIA**

Have you signed anything yet?

**BRYN**

No

**HELEN**

Only figuratively.

**ALEX**

Hamid just sneaks up, puts a pen into someone's hand and gets them to sign it while they're asleep.

**BRYN**

What! No! that's really distressing!

**BEN**

Son of a banking family!

**HELEN**

Ooh. Oh dear.

**LYDIA**

Corruption runs deep.

**BEN**

I mean it's alright they don't have a bank any more, we killed it.

**BRYN**

I hate you so much. We don't know yet. We're about to go and see.

**BEN**

We don't know how bad it is.

**HELEN**

Oh!

**BEN**

Because we killed the internet and they have an internet bank.

**HELEN**

Oh yes! You're the reason for all the suffering!

**LYDIA**

Hey!

**BEN**

Zolf would very much agree with you.

**ALEX**

There's thousands of people out there complaining that their app doesn't work. What happened to my £5?

**BEN**

But can I please say, I wasn't.

**ALEX**

Clean slate. So yes you are all in Cairo and I believe that there was a brief introduction to Eren Fairhands and specifically that, yes, good news Sasha can be healed. Bad news...

**BRYN**

The Meritocrats confiscated it.

**ALEX**

Yeah. Yeah. They do that. I mean you could've gone down incredibly risky routes which probably wouldn't have been a good idea or just, you know, there's this other option.

**LYDIA**

Kill me and...

**BRYN**

Kill you and resurrect you. Yeah that's not a safe medical procedure.

**LYDIA**

Look we've already gone through that.

**HELEN**

We're not going to do that with two paladins.

**BRYN**

That's how we got into this mess in the first place.

**LYDIA**

I could get even faster!

**(laughing)**

**BRYN**

And even more undead! Bigger and more gothic.

**HELEN**

The speedy zombie.

**BRYN**

That's a reference to something really obscure but at least one of our listeners will get it.

**ALEX**

One listener's got it. So in addition, unfortunately Hamid was having a bit of an awkward problem to do with voices in his head. Voices in his head. Yeah.

**HELEN**

Voices from the ring really.

**BRYN**

Yeah but...

**ALEX**

Yeah specifically to deliver said Macguffingham all the way to...

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

I love that Alex is sort of like James has gone, Bertie's...I've brought that wonderful sword in. I just love the idea of putting character's voices in other character's heads. Like he couldn't get over it.

**ALEX**

Just throwing it out there ring was like first Macguffingham. Literally the first Macguff...

**BRYN**

You mean Macguffin.

**ALEX**

Argh! Argh!

**BEN**

That's canon now.

**ALEX**

Oh I hate you guys.

**BEN**

Pointless items are called Macguffinghams. As we have learned.

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

I think there should be a character called Mr Macguffingham.

**BRYN**

Bertie's full name was Sir Bertrand Macguffingham.

**HELEN**

Really?

**BRYN**

Yes! He was a bad man.

**ALEX**

Let's get this train wreck back on track.

**BRYN**

How dare you!

**ALEX**

Get into an episode.

**HELEN**

I'm doing really well.

**ALEX**

You're doing a brilliant job Helen. You're still teacher's favourite!

**LYDIA**

Show us all up.

**ALEX**

So yes. Barret did sort of ask you, gentle and quietly deliver a magical item to your brother.

**BRYN**

And this was a plot turn we set up in the prologue. The prelude and we're now in season 3 and it's finally coming...that is good planning. J J Abrams I hope you're listening. That's how you write some stories!

**ALEX**

All you need to do is pay off. Just pay off. That's all you've got to do! It doesn't even have to be good. Just pay off. Just pay off! We are picking up more or less where we left off which is you've had this info dump and to make life a bit easier on everyone you are on the steps at the entrance to the Temple of Aphrodite. In front of you is the strip. Also known as Cairo in this universe. It is quite beset by sand and lots of faintly sad people are trying to clean up as best as they can and there are not a lot of people out and most of the buildings are occupied or boarded up and nothing in between.

**HELEN**

Ok. Is there anyone in need of medical assistance?

**ALEX**

Not to your eye. Anyone who needed medical assistance is kind of already in the Temple of Aphrodite.

**HELEN**

No sad dogs?

**ALEX**

No sad dogs. There are lots of sad people sweeping but short of just going over and going, hey how are you doing? Are you ok? Are you alright? There's not a lot you're going to be able to do.

**BRYN**

I mean Azu is the sort of person who might do that.

**ALEX**

So as it stands you are currently upon the strip deciding your next course of action.

**BEN**

Right so are we going to go visit your parents?

**BRYN**

Yes I think we probably should.

**HELEN**

You don't sound very pleased about that.

**LYDIA**

Yeah I assume that parents are a good thing.

**HELEN**

Family is a wonderful thing to have.

**BRYN**

Well apart from anything else I am delivering them some quite bad news.

**LYDIA**

You don't think they've already heard?

**BRYN**

Well they might have but I don't know that for sure.

**BEN**

Well we teleported so we'll be quicker than anything else.

**BRYN**

Probably.

**ALEX**

Objectively yes. That's the quickest news could possibly travel.

**LYDIA**

But we also had a nap.

**BRYN**

There were several days. They may have had a message already but I'm not sure but I also...let's just say that the last time I saw them it didn't end particularly well and I'm a little worried. But it'll probably be fine.

**BEN**

Well it's best to bundle up news into one thing so let's get it all done quickly.

**LYDIA**

Hamid they don't like assault us in an underground lair and set a bunch of dogs on us and then march us into an underground mansion and stick a cursed ring on one of us, then you're doing better than my folks aren't you?

**BRYN**

That's a good point. Thank you Sasha. That's actually really helpful.

**LYDIA**

Yeah

**HELEN**

We shall all be here to give you moral support.

**BRYN**

Right well it's just a couple of streets over in that direction. It's a...it overlooks the river.

**BEN**

Well lead on. If the river's left. Is the river left?

**LYDIA**

I mean thinking about it my uncle did send me down to fight those people and I got exploded by that whole...do you think they might explode you?

**BRYN**

Oh no. No, no, no, no. No.

**LYDIA**

Ok. It's just family can be quite violent.

**BRYN**

I've also got some awkward questions to ask them.

**HELEN**

Such as?

**BRYN**

Well I think I've finally figured out what I am.

**BEN**

A halfling.

**LYDIA**

Yeah

**ALEX**

I think you are what you are and what you are needs no...

**LYDIA**

Is that a voice in your head?

**BRYN**

I don't know! That was just Alex trying to feel included! We're having a lovely conversation and the GM has to stick his nose in.

**BEN**

Butt out universe.

**BRYN**

He's not even here in character to converse with us.

**LYDIA**

Pure wisdom coalesces from the clouds and...

**BEN**

The sand sweeper.

**LYDIA**

...drips down on us.

**ALEX**

Stop pre-empting my ins!

**(laughing)**

**BRYN**

Back in Prague I figured out I was a sorcerer.

**LYDIA**

What's that?

**HELEN**

A magic user.

**LYDIA**

We knew you used magic. All the explosions were a giveaway.

**BRYN**

So I thought I was a wizard but I'm not a wizard.

**LYDIA**

You're not a wizard Hamid.

**BRYN**

Exactly. Exactly! I've been waiting so long for that to happen! I'm fine. I'm fine. Thank you. Sorcerers are something different and they're quite...they're quite rare.

**BEN**

Right, so what's different? Are they just really good at condiments or...

**BRYN**

Oh!

**ALEX**

Bum badum ba [trumpet noise]

**BRYN**

See most sorcerers it's...very powerful wizards can sometimes transfer some of their magical power through inheritance. So sometimes the child or the grandchild of one of the most powerful wizards will develop magical abilities similar to a wizard. It's the normal way it happens but no one in my family is a

wizard. Now there are some...there's some evidence but it's not concrete but occasionally non human magical beings...

**LYDIA**

Ok I can see how awkward this could get.

**BRYN**

...well if they have offspring with a human or with one of the other sentient races can do the same thing and I think I know...do you remember...

**LYDIA**

When you turn into a little lizard.

**BEN**

The little thing. Very irritating to catch

**LYDIA**

Lizard boy, yeah.

**BRYN**

Well I don't think it was a lizard you guys.

**LYDIA**

It was. We saw it.

**BEN**

Hang on, wait...

**LYDIA**

You did not see.

**BEN**

Are you implying that you might be descended from a Meritocrat?

**BRYN**

A Meritocrat! No! God! What?! That's crazy!

**BEN**

I mean you've seen pictures of them right?!

**BRYN**

A dragon maybe. But there are other dragons apart from the Meritocrats.

**BEN**

Are there? I don't actually know. Let's petition this random speaking man.

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

Sweeping man what know thee?

**ALEX**

Well the thing is that I only answer questions based on the results of dice rolls. It's a way to pass the time. With that in mind can I get a knowledge history from everyone that has it.

**BEN**

Thank you sweeping man.

**BRYN**

Knowledge arcana?

**ALEX**

Knowledge arcana is not going to be very helpful. Knowledge history will be.

**BEN**

Knowledge nature?

**ALEX**

Knowledge nature will be as well.

**LYDIA**

Look, I only have knowledge local but I did roll a 20 so...

**ALEX**

You know where the Meritocratic offices are.

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

We can ask there can't we. Yeah.

**BEN**

15

**ALEX**

15 on knowledge nature. Anyone have any knowledge history kicking around?

**BRYN**

I mean I've only got knowledge arcana but they're magical creatures so I figure that will give me something?

**ALEX**

Uh...

**LYDIA**

Can I just do it on raw perception? Have I ever seen a dragon?

**ALEX**

Over there! How far.

**BRYN**

I mean, yes! We have seen a dragon but it wasn't Meritocrats.

**BEN**

I rest my case!

**ALEX**

So knowledge nature.

**BRYN**

I feel like this is something Hamid would already know, it's just Bryn doesn't.

**ALEX**

Hypothetically yes there could be dragons out there kicking around however it's kind of one of those things that just hasn't come up. No one thinks they're extinct. The Meritocrats have never claimed they are the only ones but it just hasn't really come up. It's hypothetically possible.

**BEN**

Look here's the thing right? With anything in nature the biggest things usually survive and have you ever seen a dragon bigger than a Meritocrat?

**BRYN**

Well no obviously.

**BEN**

So one can safely assume the Meritocrats probably killed them all thousands of years ago.

**BRYN**

You think?

**BEN**

Probably. Well how do you end up with six super powerful dragons.

**ALEX**

Off your knowledge nature you do know that up towards Russia and Siberia and around that area are some mega, mega, hyper mega fauna but they're super, super rare. They don't come up that often.

**BEN**

I forgot about that bit of world building from two years ago.

**ALEX**

It just doesn't come up.

**BEN**

Yeah like the behemoths that live in Siberia apparently.

**BRYN**

Well and there's lots of monsters that we know very little of in Central America and stuff like that.

**ALEX**

Yeah, yeah. So there are huge things wandering around. Central America could be just dragon central. Like it could be...have rollercoasters but you have no knowledge of it.

**BEN**

All the elves are like these are dragons. Stay the hell away.

**BRYN**

I mean dragons are sentient creatures. Like humans or halflings or goblins or orcs. Some of them are going to be the dragon equivalent of people who do normal jobs and some of them are going to be the dragon equivalent of wizards and the Meritocrats are the dragon equivalent of the...

**BEN**

Yeah but you've seen how sentient races interact with each other right?

**BRYN**

Well mostly killing but...

**BEN**

Exactly!

**HELEN**

It is not very pleasant.

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

Anyway...

**BRYN**

Do you remember that thing I picked up from Newton's vault?

**BEN**

There was a lot of things.

**LYDIA**

Yeah

**BRYN**

Well just the one thing that got. Anyway I'll put it on. I think it's going to make things clearer.

**HELEN**

You must be very great treasure hunters.

**BRYN**

Sort of.

**BEN**

Well we went to a man's house and he said have some of the stuff that I have. Might have stuff for you actually. We can have a check.

**HELEN**

Ooh!

**BRYN**

Most of the bags of holding were just filled with dirt, remember.

**BEN**

Do you like dirt?

**HELEN**

I was a farmer.

**BEN**

Well there we go! It might be really, really fertile.

**BRYN**

We left the dirt behind.

**HELEN**

No matter.

**BRYN**

Anyway Hamid extracts from his bag of holding a purple robe. It looks quite a lot like academic robes except it's made of really, really high quality silk.

**LYDIA**

Important point does it clash with the glowing pink?

**BRYN**

Oh yeah. Probably.

**HELEN**

Azu is not going to care.

**BRYN**

As he gets ready to put it on you see that it's got gold stitching down the lapels but the gold stitching is shifting in the same way that magical text does when you can't read it. And then he puts the robe on and the...the stitching down the lapels adjusts its pattern and stops shifting and the pattern is suddenly evocative of claws and snouts and wings. It doesn't actually represent these things. Hamid, also suddenly looks different. Not like hugely different but his face genuinely changes. There's this subtle shift of its shape...

**LYDIA**

Sort of like the vampires in Buffy.

**BRYN**

Not quite that extreme but a little bit. So he's always been quite handsome and attractive and charming and it's now...you would...

**HELEN**

No one told me this!

**BRYN**

It's on his character sheet guys! He's got charisma 18. It's how I've described him from the beginning.

**ALEX**

Hamid's a looker!

**BEN**

If you check out Anna's art, he's a bit of a hottie.

**BRYN**

Yeah. He was always supposed to be super suave and smooth but I couldn't ever play him that way because I'm not good at that.

**ALEX**

You still hit charisma 18. You just came out slightly more adorable.

**BRYN**

That's...yeah...it turns out that's in my wheelhouse. So he's now...his face is, you would describe it as, striking than charming.

**LYDIA**

Does he has lots of teeth? Is he...

**BRYN**

His face is a tiny bit pointy.

**ALEX**

You don't know how it happened. Hamid got cheekbones at some point.

**BRYN**

Yeah and his skin is...remember before, there was a time when his skin started to change a little and it looked slightly weird. It is now obvious. It is now obvious that his skin is starting to look a bit lizard-y. There's scales, it's hardened, it's no longer...it's very clearly no longer human or halfling skin. It is some other type of skin and it looks like brass to an extent.

**BEN**

Right.

**LYDIA**

Appraise Hamid.

**ALEX**

Yeah go on. Appraise Hamid.

**LYDIA**

I mean I only got 3...

**BRYN**

But your appraise bonus is...

**LYDIA**

Is 9 yeah. So 12.

**ALEX**

12. Well what it comes to...

**LYDIA**

What is Hamid as scrap metal...

**ALEX**

...yeah like you probably get the scrap value for the simple reason that who is going to fence this. It's going to be...it's not...it's a very niche demand.

**BEN**

I mean people traffickers Alex.

**ALEX**

Yeah but it's a very niche demand. When was the last time someone came in and went I want a brass looking half...honestly it would be easier...

**LYDIA**

For scraps. Sell him for scraps.

**ALEX**

Yeah

**HELEN**

What does...what does the skill spellcraft...what's that used for?

**ALEX**

So spellcraft is mostly to do things like identify things that have been cast. So let's say you run into...

**BRYN**

It's to recognise spells and spell effects and also to kind of adjust a little bit what spells do on the fly.

**BEN**

It's literally the craft of magic. Like the actual practical application of magic as a practitioner.

**BRYN**

So if you had knowledge arcana you could roll it to work out more about what Hamid is and what's happening. Which Hamid has a lot of.

**BEN**

I guess knowledge arcana is theoretical...

**BRYN**

And spellcraft is practical. Absolutely.

**ALEX**

So there is one additional affect to do with this robe.

**BRYN**

Something Alex hasn't already told me. Interesting.

**ALEX**

Which is...which is interesting. Which is, as you're watching and he's sort of showing himself off a little bit sheepishly a family tree begins to grow across to the back of the robes.

**BRYN**

What?!

**ALEX**

It's in the actual item description!

**BRYN**

Oh my god!

**ALEX**

An actual family tree...it begins down with Hamid towards the base and you ...

**LYDIA**

Can we see it because he's facing us.

**BRYN**

I've down a twirl.

**ALEX**

He hasn't seen this. He doesn't know it's happening. The rest of you watch this tree, this family tree grow from the base and branch and branch up towards the top. Could everyone give me a perception check please.

**HELEN**

Oh no.

**LYDIA**

I've only got 3 but with my bonuses that is 15.

**ALEX**

So I've got 15 from Sasha rolling a 3.

**BEN**

A critical fail.

**BRYN**

Because three people just rolled a 1, a 2 and a 3. Just FYI.

**HELEN**

Yeah I got a 2. What do I add?

**BEN**

Well Alex if you want us to notice something, don't give us a perception check in a D20 system!

**ALEX**

It's all good. It's all good. Sasha hit the DC. Yes you will add your perception modifier.

**HELEN**

6. So I got 8. So that's still probably a fail, right.

**ALEX**

Sasha, you reckon, unless you're mistaken, Apophis, which is a Meritocrat's name is written right at the top of that family tree there. I'm afraid that Azu, there's a bunch of names. A lot of them are quite weird sounding.

**HELEN**

Am I bent down like really...because your less than half my height.

**BRYN**

Yeah we are very different in size.

**HELEN**

Squinting so hard.

**BRYN**

Bent double, like what's going on down here.

**HELEN**

And it makes my back hurt so I give up trying to read.

**ALEX**

Grizzop you're fairly certain that some of the names in there are actually heading more towards Britain and UK based. They look kind of British names to your eye at a quick glance. Hamid has no awareness of this family tree. He's just gone look, I look a bit dragon-y.

**BRYN**

I didn't read the item description well enough to know this would happen.

**ALEX**

No he did not!

**BRYN**

So technically Hamid doesn't...he can feel the change on his skin but he doesn't know it's changing how he looks as dramatically as it is even.

**LYDIA**

Hamid I don't think you've got awkward questions for your parents.

**BRYN**

What?

**LYDIA**

Because it's all written.

**BRYN**

What?

**LYDIA**

Right there. There's words on the back. So you're descended from a dragon.

**BRYN**

What?!

**HELEN**

You do look a little lizard-y.

**BRYN**

Yeah I mean I thought it might change how I look a bit but what do you mean it's written on the back?

**BEN**

Well that's the thing I thought it was more like the Queen of England or something.

**BRYN**

What?! What?! Hamid takes the robe off.

**ALEX**

The second that the robe is taken off the family tree retracts itself and you see it basically...

**BRYN**

And Hamid returns to looking how he did a second before.

**ALEX**

And he looks as he did before.

**BEN**

If only there were a way that we could take a still image that we could prepare for later and then show.

**HELEN**

Some sort of...

**ALEX**

Minor illusion. Yeah.

**(laughing)**

**BRYN**

Sit for a portrait guys. It's not hard.

**LYDIA**

Have you considered a mirror?

**HELEN**

Or a cartoonist?

**ALEX**

You are in Cairo, find a caricature.

**BRYN**

I mean I'd need a series of mirrors I suppose but anyway...we'll find a way to...

**BEN**

What is that anyway? Is that like a robe of ancestry of something?

**BRYN**

It's called a robe of arcane heritage.

**LYDIA**

Well it's got your heritage.

**BEN**

Oh right so that scans.

**BRYN**

It's designed for sorcerers primarily.

**BEN**

Sure. Well it looks like it's working.

**LYDIA**

Yeah it's right there mate.

**BEN**

Yeah no questions really.

**HELEN**

It is very fetching.

**BRYN**

Thank you.

**BEN**

Which dragon...

**BRYN**

I'll put it back on.

**LYDIA**

Yeah

**ALEX**

The tree comes back. The cheekbones arrive.

**LYDIA**

Right, turn around mate.

**BRYN**

So once I wear it for 24 hours I can take it off for up to an hour and both I and it will retain

**ALEX**

Exactly.

**BRYN**

So I have to sort of attune to it.

**ALEX**

At the moment it's returned to default factory settings.

**LYDIA**

Like Sasha's going to read out the family tree. And then sort of say but surely if it's that far back then most humans would then be descended from a dragon right?

**BRYN**

Well how far back is it?

**ALEX**

So in terms of the family tree, it starts off nice and known. You know parents, grandparents, great grandparents. That's traceable. You start getting further back and you hit the limit which is where there was definitely still some kind of dynasty there but the records are a little bit shaky. Stuff got lost once or twice and then you just pass beyond the known history of your family.

**BRYN**

How many generations are on this tree?

**ALEX**

It specifically states it. It will go until it finds you the ancestor that's the source of your power.

**BRYN**

Wow!

**ALEX**

Long story short, it keeps going, keeps going.

**LYDIA**

It's very tiny font Hamid.

**ALEX**

Maybe like...

**HELEN**

No one can read it.

**ALEX**

Maybe like 800 years give or take you find yourself looking...

**BEN**

What's the name?

**ALEX**

It's Apophis.

**BEN**

Nailed it! Yes! Descended from a Meritocrat. Grizzop strikes again!

**BRYN**

It's not supposed to be able to go that many generations though.

**BEN**

We can see here

**BRYN**

I believe you.

**BEN**

Yeah Apophis is your great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grand...something. I actually don't know.

**BRYN**

Grand-dragon.

**BEN**

Grand-person.

**LYDIA**

I mean like at that stage he's got a lot of descendants. That doesn't really tell you much.

**BEN**

Well I guess it depends who he banged.

**BRYN**

It's a bit weird that I've...

**HELEN**

How vulgar!

**BRYN**

...expressed the heritage in my bloodline if none of these other people have but there's no record of it in our family history.

**BEN**

Well it's 800 years. Probably got lost.

**BRYN**

Clearly. This also overturns everything that we thought we knew and when I saw we, I mean the magical immunity, thought we knew about sorcerers because it's only supposed to be able to travel up to two generations. This is really impressive.

**BEN**

Well Meritocrats are like really magical so maybe it's...

**BRYN**

I can't believe I'm descended from a Meritocrat.

**ALEX**

Free info...

**LYDIA**

Most people are it turns out.

**BRYN**

Well maybe.

**ALEX**

Two things. One, officially this kind of fraternisation has never happened. So none of you have ever heard of anything like this, ever. And number two, you're saying that very loudly on the street.

**BEN**

Point of order as well in this universe is it known whether the Meritocrats can adopt a human form?

**ALEX**

They have done so.

**BEN**

Fine so then the whole like...you banged a humanoid...

**BRYN**

Halfling form...

**BEN**

...less troubling than it could otherwise be.

**ALEX**

Yes.

**HELEN**

Yeah I was just thinking about that.

**ALEX**

Yeah it is known that they can adopt a humanoid form. They haven't done it in a long time.

**LYDIA**

Humanoid so halfling.

**ALEX**

Yeah halfling's possible. It's known that they can do that. Also when was the last time they really needed to.

**BRYN**

Well I guess 800 years ago Alex!

**LYDIA**

Get their end away!

**BRYN**

Because they got a really hot halfling they wanted to get to know!

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

This took it to a...

**HELEN**

A Zeus thing really. I wonder if it was a shower of gold coins or a swan.

**(laughing)**

**BRYN**

We should probably stop talking about this here. Let's have any further discussions in private, maybe not just on the street.

**BEN**

You put it on!

**BRYN**

I didn't know this would happen.

**ALEX**

Is there anything else I can do for you? Says old sweeping guy that's just been stood there the whole time.

**BEN**

No, thank you very much.

**ALEX**

Alright, no worries. He just walks off.

**BRYN**

Hamid slips his sleeves off. Puts his sleeves back on and he's wearing basically the same outfit but he's now got a very lightweight cloak, almost like a cape hanging over the back of his robe so that they're obscured.

**ALEX**

Sure. Sure. I think you should be loud and proud. I reckon you should just go out there. Oi! Guess what!

**BRYN**

Let's invite the opprobrium of the Meritocrats. That sounds like a good plan. Especially when we're about to go and beg them for a favour.

**LYDIA**

Let's...let's...do you still want to talk to your parents now you know that...

**BRYN**

I've still got a lot of other things to discuss with them I think.

**BEN**

Well after that we might want to arrange a, you know, meeting with...

**BRYN**

With my grand-dragon.

**BEN**

Well no great, great, great, great, great...

**BRYN**

Well yes but I'm not going to say that every time.

**ALEX**

I'm going to take a break there and then we'll be back after you've finished saying all the greats.

**BEN**

Great, great, great...

**BRYN**

Let's leave it there shall we.

**BEN**

Alright yeah.

**LYDIA**

Well let's go chat to your family. Sounds good.

**BRYN**

Yeah well they're just up the road now.

**ALEX**

So presumably you all head off that way.

**BRYN**

Yep.

**ALEX**

Ok you head up...again I'm going to call it the strip because it's the best comparison I've got. You head up the Cairo strip and again as you head further

up you head slightly out of the commercial areas where it had all those garnishing and really tasteless pyramids all over the place and all of the larger affected building and you head into a more...I don't want to say suburban because it's very much too expensive to be suburban but you head out of the central district and into...

**LYDIA**

We're in Hampstead. Enormous houses where the house prices are such that flats on those places would be expensive.

**ALEX**

Yes that's exactly where you are.

**LYDIA**

So your eyes bleed.

**ALEX**

Really simply, the roads stop making sense and get unnecessarily fiddly and curvy so if any of your speak Arabic you will notice that the names get equally fiddly and unnecessarily verbose. But yeah...

**BRYN**

So they become like Hamid's name?

**ALEX**

Effectively. No one needs a street with 16 words but you know that you say one of them over there with 16 words. Anyway you find yourself approaching the largest of these and you know the...I have no other point of reference to give you, you know the big sort of Pride and Prejudice driveway where it's the big horseshoe out the front of the manor with a fountain and that. It's huge. It's sprawling.

**BRYN**

I was imagining it looking a bit like the Alhambra with all the different levels and the gardens on different roofs. A pitched roof at a different level. A couple of water features.

**BEN**

So it's not a house, it's an estate.

**BRYN**

Yeah

**ALEX**

Very much so. He has been calling it a house but it's an estate.

**LYDIA**

Hamid do you live in a museum?

**BRYN**

No.

**BEN**

No wonder you were friends with Bertie.

**HELEN**

Incredible.

**ALEX**

There are a couple of guards at the front gate. They don't look particularly aggressive but they have far too many plumes and tassels to be effective at their job.

**BEN**

Swiss guard level.

**ALEX**

Yeah. Yeah. Very much so. They appear not to have noticed...in fact...

**BRYN**

Do I recognise them? Do I know their names?

**ALEX**

Yes you do. I will let you pick them given that they are your guards you see.

**BRYN**

Oh god. I'm so bad with names Alex. Ok. I go up to them and greet them and go good morning Adnan. Good morning Kazeem. How are you both?

**ALEX**

Good morning sir. How can we help you today?

**BRYN**

It's me, Hamid. I know it's been 10 years.

**ALEX**

They take a double...a proper...

**BRYN**

I've grown up a little bit.

**LYDIA**

And you've grown lizard-y a bit.

**ALEX**

Oh! Oh! Master Hamid. Hello. Wow. Ok. They're both completely gobsmacked.

**BRYN**

It's a bit of a surprise that I'm here, I'm sure. I wasn't...

**ALEX**

We weren't made aware that...ok

**BRYN**

I arrived in Cairo unexpectedly but obviously I was going to drop in on mother and father and the whole family and see how everyone's doing.

**ALEX**

Of course.

**BRYN**

These are my friends. This is Grizzop acht drik Amsterdam.

**BEN**

Drik acht Amsterdam Hamid. Drik acht Amsterdam.

**LYDIA**

I think you should mess it up.

**BRYN**

I have! I got one chance to deliver it right a second time with the magic of editing but nope. If I got it wrong twice, it was just wrong.

**ALEX**

Yep.

**BRYN**

Sasha and...

**LYDIA**

Sasha nods.

**BRYN**

I know she doesn't like me to give her second name. And Azu. I'm sorry Azu I haven't caught your family name.

**HELEN**

Oh the village was small that nobody needed a second name.

**BRYN**

Of course. So Grizzop, Azu and Sasha.

**ALEX**

Of course. Of course. One of them has already been running and is opening the gate and trying to desperately,...

**BRYN**

No need to rush. Please. I don't want to put you out.

**ALEX**

He's reaching into what little guardhouse they have and he seems to be putting on some kind of vestment and he's putting it on backwards whilst the first one, who's a little bit more calm, and this is the one who's been speaking to you is like of course, yes, would you like us to announce you. We can send a runner up. Would you like something to eat? We can fetch you something.

**LYDIA**

Presumably this conversation is all in Arabic so Sasha and Grizzop do not understand a word of it.

**ALEX**

Yep. They will not have adopted another language.

**BRYN**

Apart from your names which you will...

**BEN**

Well yeah.

**LYDIA**

It's alright Sasha's worked out that you're introducing us from the names. Bit of deduction that's what you get with intelligence 16.

**ALEX**

So the second guard has managed to get the vestments out and he's struggling to get his trumpet out. It's caught in the...

**BRYN**

There's no need to stand on ceremony. I mean obviously...

**BEN**

Can we go?

**BRYN**

We'll just go to the house and I'm sure everything will be fine. Please don't...

**ALEX**

Of course, he...

**BRYN**

Please don't feel the need to prepare anything special out of the ordinary.

**BEN**

Just start trying to walk through. Saying shall we go now.

**BRYN**

I'll start walking with you.

**ALEX**

The two guards lean in, one of them has to stay at the gate. The other one is kind of trapped and eventually is sprinting to catch up with you as you make your way through the gardens.

**HELEN**

Are the guards also halfling size?

**ALEX**

Yes they're both halfling guards.

**HELEN**

Ok then I sort of sweep by majestically.

**BRYN**

You probably have to duck under the top of the gate.

**BEN**

The house is halfling size!

**BRYN**

The house is halfling size. So it will accommodate...

**BEN**

You're actually in a hobbit hole.

**HELEN**

I'm going to be like Gandalf. I'm going to hit my head on everything!

**BRYN**

It will accommodate an average sized human without a problem. Just.

**ALEX**

Just.

**BRYN**

Azu is bigger. Azu will have to stoop almost constantly.

**ALEX**

If Azu is staying she can merely stay in the guest wing intended for humans.

It'll be fine.

**BRYN**

Yeah absolutely.

**ALEX**

I mean you'd have to make use of only two bathrooms but you'll be ok.  
Anyway the guard is sort of running up...

**BEN**

The perfect size

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

The gardens are tasteful to a fault. It's all smooth curves and they've interspersed all of the plant life so it's always flowering no matter the season.

**BEN**

Is it also covered in sand?

**ALEX**

Yes. You have beat me to it which is there is a small army of gardeners who are desperately trying to rake and sort all this out because yes it is correct for the area but they weren't prepared for that kind of a thing and you can see that they're all starting to notice the little team coming up towards the house. You make it up the front steps towards the large ornate metal...I say large, large for halflings. For Azu, it's a normal sized door but just really fancy.

**HELEN**

Very impressive.

**ALEX**

And it seems to have a gold and mithril inlay. It's not solid gold.

**HELEN**

There's mithril here.

**ALEX**

Oh yeah, oh yeah. And...

**LYDIA**

Appraise.

**ALEX**

Oh go for it.

**BEN**

I think you might break.

**LYDIA**

17 + 9 so that's a 26 worth of gold.

**ALEX**

I tell you what if you managed to nick these doors you'd be well set up.

**BRYN**

The doors alone are probably worth thousands. Mostly because of the mithril. Like the gold might be worth a couple of hundred but that much mithril is definitely worth a few thousand.

**ALEX**

You know from that appraise that not only is it really valuable but the mithril inlay you notice, ah that's not just fancy, they've made a door that in a pinch is actually really strong, really robust. If a mob were to come knocking actually it would do a really good job of keeping them at bay.

**LYDIA**

Fancy bankers.

**ALEX**

But I tell you what, if you could just lift it. Mithril's light but the gold's kind of...

**LYDIA**

That might be why there's so much gold there.

**ALEX**

Something to...

**LYDIA**

Give it bulk.

**BEN**

It's ballast!

**ALEX**

But the guard who was faffing runs up, runs up, runs up, comes to the front door.

**BEN**

I'm just going to try and start opening the door.

**ALEX**

He reaches, ah ok.

**BRYN**

Thank you so much Adnan. It was lovely to see you again.

**ALEX**

And you Master Hamid. Before you go in just...you might want to...be slightly reserved.

**BRYN**

Oh. Hamid's face changes, they've heard the news.

**ALEX**

The news has already arrived sir. Yes that's actually quite why we're shocked but not...not completely surprised either.

**BRYN**

Hamid once again takes off his sleeves, puts them back on and suddenly the amount of colour in his outfit has drained. There's just the very slightest hint of his normal favoured green and purple. It's now mostly very dark grey.

**HELEN**

You're dressed in green and purple?

**BRYN**

That's the colours Hamid favours. Yeah and always three piece suits. Always three piece suits.

**HELEN**

That's fantastic. You go so well with me!

**BRYN**

The neon pink! Yeah. Brilliant.

**ALEX**

Actually sir, would you mind if I speak away from your guests just for a moment. Again all of this is in Arabic.

**BEN**

Are we going in?

**HELEN**

I can just start pushing on the door.

**BRYN**

Guys could you just wait one second. It sounds like the news may have got here and mother and father may already be in mourning. I'll just...give me one moment.

**BEN**

Yep no problem.

**ALEX**

I won't beat around the bush. It's good to see you. I wish it was in other circumstances.

**BRYN**

Of course yes.

**ALEX**

Well your...obviously your mother's very upset. Your father's taken the news rather poorly sir.

**BRYN**

Oh dear.

**ALEX**

And I think that a light foot and a gentle manner go a long way because he's not...he's not handling it very well so just thought I'd better warn you.

**BRYN**

Thank you, no I appreciate that.

**ALEX**

You might want to keep the high jinks to a minimum

**BRYN**

I've grown up a lot in the last few years Adnan.

**ALEX**

I didn't even recognise you sir.

**BRYN**

Well indeed. I know that things have been strained but I'm hoping that things will be better this time around.

**ALEX**

It's...I'm just glad that you managed to get a break from your studies in order to visit.

**BRYN**

Ha! Yes. Yes!

**ALEX**

I hope there wasn't too much trouble there.

**BRYN**

No. No trouble at all.

**ALEX**

Of course.

**BRYN**

Hamid has an incredibly high bluff skill.

**ALEX**

I'm not going to get you to roll.

**HELEN**

Did you drop out?

**BRYN**

I'm just really enjoying Helen's face. We've had all of this and Helen's like wait, what?! What's going on.

**HELEN**

The thing is I genuinely love gossip as well.

**(laughing)**

The banker's son dropped out of university!

**ALEX**

Ahh heck son

**BRYN**

Dropped out?! No!

**ALEX**

That would be so much easier!

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

Oh my god!

**BRYN**

Fantastic.

**ALEX**

So jumping back to the Hamid conversation here. Yeah so if anything else we can do for you sir. Is there anyone you need us to get in touch with or anything?

**BRYN**

No I don't think so. Is...checking my family name...is Saira around? Is she at home at the moment?

**ALEX**

Yes the whole family is here.

**BRYN**

Good, good, good. Well it'll be nice to see everyone.

**ALEX**

Yes of course. Let us know...

**BRYN**

Thank you so much Adnan. We'll go in now and I'll introduce my friends to the family and I'm sure it'll be ok.

**ALEX**

Adnan breaks, reaches out and gives the quickest hug to Hamid ever and then immediately returns back to a professional decorum and then runs off back down to the...

**BRYN**

Hamid definitely doesn't cry. Definitely doesn't cry. Not even a little bit.

**LYDIA**

From your lizard-y lips.

**BRYN**

Don't know what you mean.

**LYDIA**

Does your dragon tongue shoot out?

**BRYN**

I don't have a dragon tongue!

**ALEX**

But really sadly.

**BRYN**

I'm still several levels away from achieving my final form guys.

**LYDIA**

When does the dragon tongue come?

**BEN**

There will be no reptilian blep now.

**ALEX**

You head in...

**BRYN**

I think in five levels I can grow wings.

**LYDIA**

I'm less excited about that.

**ALEX**

You head into the building proper and yes, whilst it is built for halflings it can accommodate Azu. You're having to stoop though. The thing that becomes immediately apparent is that whilst the outside is still business as normal if people are desperately trying to deal with the sandstorm inside there might be quite a lot of black drapery and there is...it's basically a butler is the closest comparison I've got who immediately comes over, sees Hamid and doesn't say anything. Offers him a black armband and just leans in really quietly, is there anything I can do for your sir. Again in Arabic.

**BRYN**

I'll turn to address the group and go, does anyone want anything? There'll probably be food and drink but...

**BEN**

No you deal with that. Don't worry about...

**HELEN**

We are here for you.

**BRYN**

Thank you. No we'll be fine.

**ALEX**

I'll notify your family that you've arrived and if your guests are able to wait here I will immediately see that they're attended to.

**LYDIA**

Sasha puts her hands in her pockets.

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

Interior actually bit disappointing because it's almost like they haven't deliberately put every, single most valuable, shiny thing out. It's actually almost the inverse. It's got kind of a minimalist vibe once you're inside. There's not a lot. There's the occasional tasteful urn and you're like I could probably live off that for a year but it's not the horde you really want it to be.

**LYDIA**

The thing is about having bags of holding is that you can just slip enormous things.

**ALEX**

Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

**LYDIA**

It's not like you...all you can do now is pick up a watch or something off someone's hand. It's not like...

**ALEX**

You can take the grandfather clock.

**HELEN**

Are you thieving from your friends?

**BEN**

Just thinking really hard about how much she isn't.

**LYDIA**

The point is that her hands are in her pockets and she's not running calculations in her head.

**ALEX**

So would you like me to do that sir?

**BRYN**

I feel that my guests should be included in the wake for reasons which will become clear but I suppose for the time being if, again I turn back to them, would you guys mind waiting while I go and see my family. I think you should come and meet them. I think they'll want to ask you about...

**LYDIA**

You want us to come now? Really?

**BRYN**

In a minute maybe. I mean maybe. I don't know for certain.

**LYDIA**

Alright.

**BEN**

Fine.

**HELEN**

Whatever your customs are.

**BRYN**

Thank you.

**LYDIA**

[Whispers] what a nice clock.

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

Very good sir. He heads up the staircase.

**BRYN**

So why don't you guys wait in here and I'll...I'll usher you into one of the smaller receiving rooms.

**ALEX**

Oh the third lounge.

**BRYN**

Yeah. They'll bring you anything you need and I'll come back as soon as I'm able to.

**BEN**

Yeah. Do what you need to do.

**ALEX**

You head into the third lounge. There's a little dingy bell which opens. It's very unobtrusive and you notice that it's coming from a different part of the house.

**BRYN**

Are you appraising the bell?

**LYDIA**

I'm appraising the bell, yeah.

**ALEX**

Go for it.

**LYDIA**

I got a 23.

**ALEX**

Oh that's a magical bell.

**LYDIA**

Oh!

**ALEX**

It's going to be a nightmare if you're going to palm it though.

**LYDIA**

It's probably keyed into the system.

**ALEX**

Yeah exactly.

**HELEN**

It'll ring basically

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

Sasha has stolen alarm systems in the past.

**ALEX**

So yeah, in the lounge...

**BRYN**

This is a really good alarm system it nearly beat me. I'll sell it to someone else.

**HELEN**

As this is a small room Azu is just going to lie down.

**LYDIA**

Is there a chaise longue. There must be a chaise longue.

**ALEX**

Of course there's a "chez longoo"

**LYDIA**

A "chez longoo"

**BRYN**

There's two.

**HELEN**

She pushes them together.

**(laughing)**

And feels claustrophobic.

**ALEX**

The butler returns after a short break...

**BRYN**

Yeah so I'll have started heading up the stairs but I'm going to wait for him to usher me in.

**ALEX**

Yeah he comes. Master Hamid if you're ready?

**BRYN**

Yes I showed them into the third...

**ALEX**

That's absolutely fine. They'll be attended to.

**BRYN**

Thank you.

**ALEX**

If you'd like to...

**BRYN**

Yes, yes.

**ALEX**

He heads up the stairs. You head on to the living landing and then from there...well the living landing one is the one that is only attended by family and key servants.

**HELEN**

There isn't a dead landing somewhere?

**LYDIA**

They will be needing that.

**ALEX**

I think you might be talking about the crypt. They're not necessarily on site. How very tasteless. So upon the living land he starts walking and it becomes very clear that you are being led towards the family drawing room. It's the most informal of the rooms. Admittedly it does have lots of portraits of your forebears and ancestors upon the walls.

**BEN**

Not all of them!

**BRYN**

The people who are listed on the back of my robe now.

**LYDIA**

Awkward!

**ALEX**

But he leads you forwards and then knocks gently on the door twice.

Eventually there's a "enter" and the butler gestures and gives you a little pat on the back as you head in and then he closes the door behind you. I'm going to cut to the rest of the party briefly.

**BEN**

So no...you know before you were doing stuff with Aphrodite like, what did you...

**LYDIA**

Where'd you grow up?

**BEN**

What are you in to?

**HELEN**

Farming and...

**LYDIA**

That sounds above ground.

**HELEN**

Is that important?

**BEN**

Did you grow up below ground as well?

**LYDIA**

Yeah!

**BEN**

Me too! Yeah!

**HELEN**

Is that why you are small?

**(laughing)**

**BEN**

No.

**LYDIA**

How insensitive

**HELEN**

Oh!

**BEN**

No we lived underground because we weren't allowed to live above ground.

**LYDIA**

Yeah similar.

**HELEN**

What? Why? What? What a terrible...

**ALEX**

As this conversation goes on a couple of incredibly unobtrusive halflings enter. Young male, young woman and they head up and they basically pass their hands across a coffee table and a selection of drinks appear and they begin allocating them and providing glasses and...

**BRYN**

It doesn't come in pints. They're quite small.

**ALEX**

And they're just very, very quietly, if there's anything you'd like just pass your hand upon the circles and we'll probably be able to accommodate. Is there anything specific that we can get for you?

**BEN**

No, fine, thanks.

**ALEX**

Very good. Very good. And they head off and then just stand in the doorway beside the door looking in. They're not paying attention. They're not staring. They're like heads down but they're just in attendance.

**HELEN**

Oh. This is most unusual.

**BEN**

Yeah I'm not used to this.

**HELEN**

No.

**LYDIA**

I mean I saw it at a hotel once.

**BRYN**

Oh god and neither of you were there! Ah!

**LYDIA**

It was...it came before quite a lot of disasters so...

**BEN**

Oh! Well I hope it doesn't repeat.

**LYDIA**

Just...let's just not talk about anything important here.

**BEN**

Ok right.

**ALEX**

I'm going to cut to Hamid. So heading into the drawing room. It's very quiet. It's very quiet and the whole family are there. Your father is at the far end of the room staring out of a large bay window across the rear of the estate out over the river and your mother is sort of sat upon a chaise longue. She turns up and sees you and she chokes up and then turns away. The two youngest brothers don't appear to be in this room specifically and your brother is sat at the table quietly with a drink in hand and your now eldest sister is...she's the only one who sees you enter, acknowledges you and doesn't either break or ignore you. She just turns to you and pats the chair next to you and it's all just very quiet.

**BRYN**

I will nod to Saira but I'm going to go over to my mother and I'm not going to say anything. I'm just going to hug her.

**ALEX**

She leans in and hugs you back.

**BRYN**

I start crying.

**ALEX**

Yeah.

**BRYN**

So does Hamid!

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

I think I'm going to have to end the episode there!

**BEN**

Oh my goodness!

**ALEX**

This is sad!

**BRYN**

Dammit Alex!

**BEN**

Should we leave? The next episode should we leave and just let you two hug it out?

**ALEX**

I couldn't handle...

**HELEN**

Wait are you crying?

**BRYN**

Nearly.

**HELEN**

Awww

**ALEX**

I couldn't handle a real time episode in that context. It would break me.

**BEN**

Goodness me. Can we just slam cut to...I don't know what you slam cut to appropriately

**BRYN**

I'm sure I'll have it together by next week guys.

**ALEX**

Ok well we'll come back later. Bye guys!

**EVERYONE**

Bye!

**[Show Theme - Outro]**

**ALEX**

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