

RQG – 152 – Decompressing

Content Warnings **leave as shown unless dictated otherwise**

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ALEX

Hi, everyone. Alex here with a quick message ahead of today's episode. As you all know the main narrative of the Rusty Quill Gaming Campaign Erasing the Line was prepared a number of years ago and part of that campaign deals heavily with the concept of a global pandemic and how this affects the characters and the story world. Today's episode and a number of episodes following it delve pretty deeply into this aspect of the narrative. They examine ideas of infection, quarantine, isolation and mass mortality which some listeners might find disturbing. Also, these episodes were recorded well prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and so we ask listeners to bear this mind. We have elected to release them as originally intended so as to not provide a disservice to the original narrative but listener discretion is strongly advised. That's all for now. Keep being kind to one another and we hope you enjoy the episode.

[Show Theme - Intro]

ALEX

Hello and welcome to episode 152 of the Rusty Quill Gaming podcast. I'm your host and GM Alex Newall and with me today, I have

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BEN

Ben Meredith

BRYN

Bryn Monroe

LYDIA

Lydia Nicholas

HELEN

And Helen Gould

ALEX

And who are you playing?

BEN

Zolf Smith

BRYN

Hamid Saleh Haroun al-Tahan

LYDIA

Cel Sidebottom

HELEN

And Azu

ALEX

Cool, just let me check my notes. So, killed everyone...

LYDIA

01:18 ??.

ALEX

Everyone's extremely dead. All of the traps, giblets, yes. I might actually have to have a character conversation in this episode.

(everyone) Uuurgh.

ALEX

I know. It's not really what we're here for but here we are.

HELEN

Well, emotions are my bag. But not Azu's at the minute.

(laughter)

ALEX

So, as it stands...

HELEN

Bag of holding.

LYDIA

Basically, infinite sadness in here.

ALEX

You are in a luxury bathysphere, let's call it. It's a good as description as you're going to get really. Having made it out of the Shoin Institute or at least 90% of the way and having encountered Barnes and Carter. Things to be aware within the bathysphere now that you can have a proper look round, now that there's actually like time to, you all notice there's actually a decent number of bodies on the floor. It seems like Carter and Barnes may have actually been doing some actual fighting.

BEN

Until Alex started rolling their dice.

ALEX

Until I started rolling in which point it just became hot garbage. Long story short, this is very much not in combat. As such, Barnes and Carter, I'm going to keep saying Carnes and Barter, I've done it once and now I'm just going to keep swapping.

LYDIA

That's their team name.

ALEX

So, Barnes and Carter both see and acknowledge you. Carter immediately he sort of flourishes his hand and then there's a dagger in there that wasn't in before and he puts it away and Barnes gives a little bit of flourishing, sheaths his sword and gives a bow to all of you.

BRYN

"Everything okay, gentlemen?"

HELEN

"Who are you?"

BEN

"Oh, right, introduction. Barnes..."

ALEX

"Hello."

BEN

"Carter."

ALEX

"Hello."

HELEN

"I know who Carter is. "Hello, Barnes."

ALEX

"Hello. Hello. Hello, Azu."

LYDIA

"Hi, I'm I'm Cel."

ALEX

"Hello, Cel."

LYDIA

"Just for clarification as there was some conflicting... I mean, I have chased them off enough times you would think they would remember it. My pronouns are they/them, just so you know. Just... just, I won't have to kill you if you get that right. Thanks."

ALEX

"Right..."

LYDIA

"Yes."

ALEX

“Yeah, that’s fine. So, how are we standing?”

BRYN

“We need to go into isolation.”

BEN

“We’ve got Shoin’s brain as well. “

HELEN

“We think it’s 03:20 ??.”

LYDIA

“It’s an orb. It’s an orb.”

BEN

“Remember that I said about Mr Ceiling?”

ALEX

“Yeah.”

BEN

“The same thing but to himself.”

BRYN

“Sort of the same thing, yes.

BEN

“And half... one hemisphere of his brain has been infected with blue vein.”

ALEX

“Right, right. So, we’re going to need a **property roof 03:32 ??** then”

BEN

“Yes.”

ALEX

“Cool, yeah. Okay.

BEN

“We also need to get out.”

ALEX

“Right, in that case then shall we all just go?”

BEN

“Yes.”

HELEN

“Yes, can we please leave?”

ALEX

Yes, mutual suspicion order of the day. No touching. No hugging. No happiness.

LYDIA

“Oh, okay, but could we do all of this like maybe in my teashop?”

BEN

“No. Well, okay... if we go back to your teashop and one of us has been affected by the blue veins there is a possibility of spreading it to Jasper and the rest of your village. We need to isolate ourselves until we know for sure that we haven't been infected.”

HELEN

“Again.”

ALEX

“Well, first, do we need to worry about you all being followed?”

BEN

“No, everyone we have met is dead.”

HELEN

“Apart from the kobolds but they’re fine.”

BEN

“We’ll do it in the debrief. But, yeah, that the danger.”

LYDIA

“Oh, I guess okay. Okay.”

BEN

“The condition has wiped out like most of Europe so, we can... we can...”

LYDIA

“Yep, I guess, okay.”

BRYN

“We can get an update on your village and make sure they’re okay. We’re not going to leave in the dark but the safest thing is for us to be isolated.”

ALEX

“Fair enough. In that case then, we’ve laid out most of the tunnel on the way here. Basically, we figured you might need a clean exit but it looks like you didn’t necessarily need us.”

BEN

“No.”

HELEN

“It’s helpful.”

LYDIA

“I really appreciate everything that you did. This is a lot of bodies. It’s like wading through gore. I think... I think you did a great job and you should feel proud of yourselves.”

ALEX

It’s worth noticing at this point, by the way, that despite his sort of flamboyant privateer thing, Barnes has quite a reserved and boring speaking manner, if you see what I mean. Like, he’s quite dower despite the... like, what’s the word? Physical flamboyance.

LYDIA

Oh, I see.. So, 05:02 ? low charisma.

HELEN

Oh, an emotionally unavailable pirate, Alex. That’s what you’re telling me.

(laughter)

BEN

You've come into Helen's house.

(laughter)

ALEX

In which case then, I'm happy to accelerate to is everyone basically wanting to exit?

HELEN

Yeah.

BEN

Yes.

ALEX

As in exit via Bathysphere almost as it were.

LYDIA

That is 05:21 ??.

ALEX

So, there is the door that the other two tried to flee through and did not make it far. Do you want to loot their bodies in any way?

BEN

No.

HELEN

That's how I know I've thrown enough mooks at you.

BRYN

I might cast attack magic occasionally just in case any of the bodies have magical items on them because those would be worth looting, anything else don't care.

ALEX

Barnes and Carter glow like a fireworks factory.

BRYN

Sure.

ALEX

Sorry, a fireworks factory where something has gone wrong.

BRYN

Sure.

ALEX

But the mooks have nothing magical on them whatsoever. Oh, that's not true. There's some water breathings in there if you want them.

BRYN

No.

ALEX

I figured as much.

LYDIA

We really do not trust the maintenance.

ALEX

Would you... would you? In which case then Barnes and Carter lead the way. You notice though that... again, Zolf kind of old hat, both of them are walk forward keeping eyes on the people who are behind them and healthy...

HELEN

"Do one of you want to be behind us so you don't have to keep looking at us?"

ALEX

"That's not necessarily a solution to the problem because you're still going to have to look behind at us."

HELEN

“Oh, yes.”

BEN

“We need to keep an eye on everyone else.”

HELEN

(sighs) “I hate this.”

BEN

“Yep, but it’s how it is now.”

HELEN

“I hate it.”

ALEX

“On the bright side though it sort of puts everything else into perspective, doesn’t it?”

HELEN

“What’s everything else?”

ALEX

“You know, just makes everything else seem a little trivial really.”

LYDIA

Cel doesn't know about his crimes so cannot make a witty comment.

BRYN

"No, not really."

ALEX

"Onwards."

BEN

"Hang on a minute, you've met before, right?"

ALEX

"Yes."

HELEN

"Yes."

BEN

Look at Carter, "What do you do?"

ALEX

"Me?" He's a thief.

BEN

“Well, I know that.”

HELEN

“And he’s very annoying.”

ALEX

“I am an excelling thief.”

HELEN

“No, you’re not. We found you in a pit.”

ALEX

“I have been unfortunate as have we all.”

HELEN

“You got cursed while trying to thieve like the same place.”

ALEX

“Big words from **Miss ?? 07:16**, Miss A Year, I don’t really understand what happened there.”

HELEN

“That wasn’t... that was something else.”

ALEX

“Naaa.”

BEN

“Carter, just maybe don’t...”

ALEX

“Like a nine to like a four.”

BEN

“Let’s just walk in silence.”

(laughter)

ALEX

Carter just... Carter just... yeah, he’s quiet. Barnes gives what can best be construed to the uninitiated as a thank you eyes.

LYDIA

Cel might after a little while... just like the silence is difficult so...

ALEX

Oh, yeah.

LYDIA

I mean, I'm just thinking about how one could, you know, solve this problem of the seeing all around one and isolating Wilde getting things done. Like, maybe if there was some sort of pod system where like we all had an individual pod and imagine that continuing for an extremely long time. None of the solutions are workable.

ALEX

Barnes is patient, Carter's interested and thus the walk continues. As a brief description, from this bathyspherey bit it actually tilts a little bit down as a corridor into underground again. It is in the same sort of, "Ooh, look. Braisers 08:21 ?? on the wall. Ooh, spooky. Ooh."

HELEN

"Welcome adventurers!"

ALEX

Yeah, very much so. And it continues on the flat for maybe another sort of 20 minutes or so then it starts to curve upwards at a nice gradual incline and at this point there's another one of those sort of stations where it's like a pressure door, lockers etc, and what appear to be cart rails lead to this door, as in like mining cart rails.

LYDIA

Aaah.

BEN

We're playing Minecraft.

LYDIA

Yay!

ALEX

And presumably you all head continuing up.

BRYN

I push the button, get in the cart, off I go. Are they rails or...?

ALEX

Oh, no, there's no cart there, just the rails.

BRYN

I press the button, expect the cart to turn up because that's how it works, right?

ALEX

Yeah, that's fine.

HELEN

Does it turn up?

ALEX

No.

BRYN

I guess I'll press the button and be like... and look at Barnes and Carter who presumably come down this way.

ALEX

09:08 ??.

BRYN

No.

BEN

A man can dream.

ALEX

Carter kind of gives a big grin and then points off to side round the corner where you can see the wrecked remains of a mine cart.

BRYN

(sighs) Why?

ALEX

In his defence it was a very, very quick and surprising entrance for them.

BEN

Fair enough.

ALEX

Heading back up, what appears to be... it has a more of a sort of mine vibe, it stops being a... actually, no, you would have the knowledges for this. Could you give me your miner's knowledge? I'm not sure which one it triggers into, actually.

LYDIA

Profession miner.

BEN

Knowledge...oh, no, hang on a minute. Yeah, I don't have profession miner because been a long ,long time. I'm actually kind of bad at all of this.

LYDIA

Yeah, that's why you quit being miner.

BEN

I can do survival.

ALEX

No, never mind then. Cel, try a knowledge engineering but this is a bit of a stretch you'll have to do very well.

LYDIA

I mean, they rolled a three so that is a 15.

ALEX

Out through the mine we go. So, yeah, you head up through this...

LYDIA

Cel comments, "Nice mine."

ALEX

You head up through this mine shaft, it has a couple of signs, avenues. It's not really clear what they were mining for here, if at all ever but heading up through the shaft eventually you can start seeing that there is daylight at the far end and yeah... heading up you find yourselves actually comparatively far from the sea. You can still hear it in the distance but you're not on the shore, you've come out into a quite heavily wooded area. There appears to be a lot of like foliage, you know, false foliage and so on, pushed to one side. Think the kind of thing that you would pull across a mine entrance and then there is a campsite set off a little further away. It has a couple of wagons and a few crates there.

HELEN

Oh, my gosh.

ALEX

And you can spot at least two bodies sort of splayed across the crates and so on.

HELEN

It looks like the sky room.

(everyone) Yeah.

HELEN

It's just absolutely...

BEN

When we get out, Zolf's breathing changes to be far more relaxed.

HELEN

Yeah, so does Azu's. Azu does a real big stretch.

ALEX

Like every single vertebrae from neck to like hip just one at a time, pop pop pop.

HELEN

Neck vertebrae.

ALEX

You have been stooped for like two and a half days or something by this point.

HELEN

So much tension.

ALEX

Time of day by the way, yeah, it's midday-ish. Hard to tell.

LYDIA

Oh, she can see the sun.

ALEX

Oh, yeah, good point.. Weather.

HELEN

The sun is gone.

ALEX

Yeah, so, the sun is gone but there are three moons.

LYDIA

There's an eye instead. Oh, no!

ALEX

Zolf and Cel, this is the first sunny day you can remember on this island for months, if not more.

BEN

“Looks like we did some good. The storm’s gone.”

HELEN

“Yes. Oh, good.”

LYDIA

Is there an obvious like promontory or a site point or a hill that one might up and thus be able to get one’s bearings?

ALEX

Yeah. So, if you were... so, obviously the mine shaft itself is sort of raised in.

LYDIA

Okay.

ALEX

There’s a sort of tor that it’s built into and so it’s like a rocky outcrop but it does have plants and stuff on it. It’s not huge. You could climb to the top of that sort of on top of the mineshaft.

LYDIA

Cel dashes up that.

ALEX

Yeah, it's trivial, it's not hard. It takes a little bit of a scramble at one point, you climb up. You are still towards the coast, you are actually not too far... you know the area, I should say, not like in perfect detail but you can get the lay of the land very quickly.

LYDIA

Yeah, might not have been in these woods but know roughly where I am, relative to the shore.

ALEX

Yeah, exactly. So, you are... you are probably a couple of miles actually from where you set off in the boat in the first place and in terms of other things that you can see, there are plumes of smoke coming up from the isle in the distance, which you can now see near the horizon because the air has cleared. You can see that there's a huge amount of... you can actually see the beach from here looking down, it's maybe a like 20 minute walk across terrain between here and the beach and the beach itself appears to have a large amount of detritus on it, it takes you a moment to be like, "What's going on there?" It's like, "Oh." There have been storm waters perpetually for months. This is the first time that the waters have receded enough. So, it's like have you ever been on like a beach or something where there has been storm and everything's sort of brushed up? That but everywhere, is the best description I

can give you and the cloud cover appears natural for the first time in ages. Yeah, so, you reckon that from here you could get to your teashop by evening. To get to the village that sort of Zolf and co came from, a little bit longer, maybe like you'd be arriving in the wee hours if you just set off now and didn't do a forced march.

BEN

While when Cel kind of dashes up, I'm going to walk after them, don't know what you're doing in the intervening, Cel, but if you're still there...

LYDIA

No, just dash to the top of the hill so looking around.

BEN

I'll join you up there go, "Thank for your help. We've... good job, thanks."

LYDIA

"Oh, thank you, Mr **Swiss? 3:58 ??**. Good job, you. Good fighting, finishing it, you know, then just trying to hold them off for a very long time and that's... that wasn't good enough."

BEN

"Well, I hope your village can, you know, breath a bit easier, get back to living."

LYDIA

“Well, so can a lot of other people, right? Like, don’t know if I can... I can excuse waiting as long as I did to go after him.”

BEN

“I wouldn’t beat yourself up about that, honestly.” And then I’ll reach up and pat you on the shoulder.

ALEX

Reach up, keep reaching. Go higher on the reaching.

BEN

Yeah, like I can kind of just about.

LYDIA

Yeah.

BEN

“But look, I’ll leave you up here, take as long as you want. I’ll, you know...”

LYDIA

“No, I was just trying to get my... my bearings. Where is that you want to go for your kind of isolation time?”

BEN

We should go back to the tavern, they've got anti-magic cell, which shall keep us in check."

LYDIA

"Well, then, we'll need to start walking fast and we'll need to start walking hard. Or you can levitate so there's that, and... if there's no more fighting to do I suppose I can fly there, get dinner ready."

BEN

"Let's go together in case one of us... we shouldn't separate, we should be keeping an eye on each other just in case. Sorry."

LYDIA

"No, no, it's... let's be off that way if you can still trust my directions. Honestly, wouldn't trust my directions either."

(laughter)

LYDIA

"There's being good and there's being good at directions. That's a different thing. I've known some very evil people that are really great with directions."

BEN

"I don't... Barnes and Carter will have come from there so maybe I should find the way back."

LYDIA

“Yes, okay. Cool.”

BEN

“Alright.” I’m going to start heading back to the party.

HELEN

Azu has gone near Hamid and then just is lying face down on the floor.

(laughter)

ALEX

Near Hamid, key point.

HELEN

Near Hamid.

LYDIA

We’re just doing like... doing like grass angels.”

BRYN

That’s a good point like, spreadeagled or just like hands to the side.

HELEN

Yeah, just like...

BRYN

Or just T posing.

HELEN

Like a tree has fallen..

BRYN

Fair enough.

(laughter

ALEX

Let the armour take the... that's what it's for. Doooong.

HELEN

Yeah.

BRYN

“Do you need a hand, Azu?”

HELEN

“No.” Azu is going to take your hand briefly and just be like, “I am glad that you came back because it was scary when you were missing in the horrible tunnels.”

BRYN

“Yeah, it was... I wish we hadn't had to split up, I didn't want Skraak to worry so I was trying to be brave but...”

HELEN

“You are brave.”

BRYN

“Thank you, yeah. I didn't want to be separated either but I knew we'd find each other again. I didn't ever... and we did a lot of good. We...”

HELEN

“Yes, that was horrible.”

BRYN

“It's a nasty place but it's better now.”

HELEN

“Mm. Do you want to sit down?”

BRYN

“No, no, the quicker we start doing isolation the quicker it’s over.”

HELEN

“Oh. I keep not thinking about it.

BRYN

“And to be honest, fine, it just really isn’t as tiring as walking and running so I’m probably doing okay compared to the rest of you I reckon.”

(laughter)

ALEX

You don’t have to be okay.

BRYN

“I know, I’m worried about everyone and I need to get in touch with my family and I need to... I want to check on Skraak and I don’t know if going back to the island is a good idea and...”

HELEN

“Call... you still have the mobile phone?”

BRYN

“Yeah, yeah. I just... we’ve just been so busy and there’s been so much else going on but I think... I don’t think it’s safe to do now if we still have to do this quarantine thing.”

HELEN

“Well, why not? You’re not in the same place.”

ALEX

“I guess, yeah. I guess I could do that while we’re heading back to the...”

HELEN

“You should call them.”

BRYN

“Alright.”

HELEN

“It’s good to know that family are safe.”

BEN

Come back. “Right, we should probably get back, aye?”

BRYN

“Yeah.”

HELEN

“Mmm.”

LYDIA

“Yeah, if we want to get there by... while it’s still light, we need to be going fast.”

BEN

“Alright.”

LYDIA

“I mean, we might need to be running but ... like, I mean, it doesn’t matter, we can walk in the dark. You can do your lights thing.”

BRYN

“Yeah, yeah.”

LYDIA

“It could be a fun bonding activity except where we’re all suspicious of one another.”

BEN

“Well, no, we don’t have to be suspicious of... look, Carter, Barnes, you know the way, let’s go and when we...”

ALEX

Carter's not there, Barnes is.

BEN

"Wait, where's Carter?"

ALEX

"Getting the horses."

BEN

"Oh, right, fair enough. Now, come on."

LYDIA

"How many horses?"

HELEN

"I would like to summon my camel. Topaz."

ALEX

"No one told us about a camel."

HELEN

"Bing, bing."

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(everyone makes a camel noise)

ALEX

Okay, yeah...

HELEN

“This is Topaz my camel. “

ALEX

“That is a camel, yes.”

HELEN

“I am going to spend so time with Topaz.”

ALEX

“Right.”

HELEN

Azu does like, “You know how in horse films...”

(laughter)

BRYN

Oh, good old horse films. Love em.

LYDIA

Yeah.

LYDIA

There's like, "No, you can't go down there. A camel killed your mother."

(laughter)

HELEN

"No one can tame that camel. Trust no one." Anyway...

BEN

"But, father, I love the camel."

HELEN

Azu is going to do like a hug of the camel neck. No, she's not even reaching up because...

ALEX

You're massive!

HELEN

Just like a... just like a hug with the camel.

ALEX

You show a basic amount of affection to a person... while an animal that you have not been around recently. However, worth bearing in mind, celestial camels way smarter than normal camels, basically people.

HELEN

Yeah.

ALEX

Yeah, it's all good.

HELEN

Yeah.

LYDIA

Are they like with the mental power of people but with the spite and spit power of a camel?

BEN

They are... if they are celestial they are canonically good.

LYDIA

Right.

HELEN

That doesn't mean it can't be spiteful.

LYDIA

Exactly.

BEN

I'm just pointing out that...

ALEX

Canonically in this world, camels, celestial camels especially, yes, might be good, very judgmental. Very judgmental as animals. Their threshold for what's acceptable when they detect evil is much higher.

(laughter)

HELEN

Oh, yeah, camels like Topaz.

ALEX

"Why do you spit on him? He saved a bunch of orphans", "He didn't save enough of". Right. So, whilst you basically are reacquainting yourself with your celestial steed...

HELEN

Yeah.

ALEX

Carter eventually returns leading the first of the horses and so on. They are not in great condition, they don't appear to have been maltreated but Cel, again, supplies have been short of the island for obvious reasons. So, they are thinner than they should be but not so much that it's necessarily a problem.

HELEN

Oh, dear.

LYDIA

"He, little buddy..."

ALEX

And Carter goes back and fetches the rest. There is a, god knows where they got it, little Shetland for Hamid, couple of riding horses is a strong word, horses that aren't massive carthorses for Cel. They have a big shire style horse, like a large carthorse one for Azu, which is just there I guess.

HELEN

Topaz glares at the shire horse.

ALEX

Yeah, very much. “How dare you.” Zolf is offered another Shetland as well.

BEN

“Yeah, jump on.”

ALEX

“Is that enough now then, or...?”

HELEN

“Let’s just go, get things over with.”

ALEX

“I mean, just asking, is there a chance we could, you know, cannibalise the island for...”

BEN

“No.”

LYDIA

“There is others... not actually that much of of much use down there really, unless you’re really into water breathing potions, they have a lot of those.”

ALEX

“What? Really?”

LYDIA

“Yeah, you...maybe you should go and get some water breathing potions if that’s all you want. I mean, I could...”

ALEX

“That’s not a bad idea.”

BEN

“You know what, you are going to get murdered by kobolds.”

ALEX

“It’s weird, you and 21:32 ?? started speaking at the same time and said almost the same thing, you just also had the word kobolds.” Carter shuts up.

BRYN

“Let’s get on our way. We’ve got more important things to do, Carter.”

LYDIA

“Let’s rush off to sit around and do nothing.”

(laughter)

BEN

“We need to debrief.”

BRYN

“Yeah.”

BEN

“Wilde can report back.”

ALEX

So, with that in mind, I am guessing everyone is heading back to the inn headquarters.

BEN

Yes.

BRYN

I’m going to take Azu’s suggestion and while we’re riding along I’m going to take out the mobile stone and sort of stare at it for a little while psyching myself up and then activate it and attempt to contact Ishaq.

ALEX

Okay.

BRYN

I assume it’s a Use Magic Device roll?

ALEX

Yes, it is. It's more complex than just yelling at it when... well, when it was just Einstein, there's only one person you have to contact.

HELEN

True.

BRYN

29.

ALEX

Okay, cool. You know that you've succeeded. It starts sort of warming up slightly in the way that you've become accustomed to whenever you've been speaking to Einstein and so on. There's no speech for a while. What's the first thing that you try and say down it?

BRYN

Just his name. "Ishaq? Ishaq?" I know that it can take a while to get a connection and stuff and people may not be paying to it the whole time.

ALEX

Are you willing to try for more than say like a minute?

BRYN

Oh, yeah, yeah.

ALEX

Okay, fine. After about a minute or so, there's a little quiet voice. It sounds like someone's trying to be quieter and it's just like... "Hello."

BRYN

"Ishaq, is that you?"

ALEX

"Hey, what? Who's this?"

BRYN

"It's Hamid."

ALEX

"Aw hey, Hamid, hey. Aw, how you doing?"

BRYN

"We're here."

ALEX

"Wait, wait, are you a zombie?"

BRYN

"No."

ALEX

“Oh, wicked. Okay, cool.”

BRYN

“We’re here. We’re alright. Things have been a bit stressful, a bit complicated, a bit dangerous but we’ve made it through.”

ALEX

“Yeah, has everyone turned suspicious now? Are you as well?”

BRYN

“Yes, very much so.”

ALEX

“Proper weird.”

BRYN

“Have you seen everyone else yet? Have you seen Ismail and Saira and...?”

ALEX

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, we all met up.”

BRYN

“Oh, thank god. And they’re okay?”

ALEX

“Yeah, they’ve been south of Cairo.”

BRYN

“Sure.”

ALEX

“We all basically went to...” Oh, god, Alex just remembered as he’s speaking, how rich Hamid is. “Yeah, yeah, we just went to the country house.”

BRYN

“That’s good. I mean, it looked like things were pretty dire in Cairo. What about mother and father and Saleh?”

ALEX

“Oh, well, I know that they moved dad to a different place, they’re not... they’re not telling me where. Mum’s alright, Saleh’s well busy, I barely see her.”

BRYN

“I’m sure, yeah.”

ALEX

“But... but Ismail’s been rubbish.”

BRYN

“Why’s he been rubbish?”

ALEX

“Really tall.”

(laughter)

BYRN

Hamid also laughs, like he can’t help laughing.

ALEX

“He’s really, really tall and he is well good at magic now. He can do like that lights thing and he keeps shooting stuff off the... he’s really annoying”

BRYN

“He’ll be able to teach you Ishaq.”

ALEX

“He’s not teaching me nothing.”

BRYN

“Well, tell him I said he has to.”

ALEX

“I did I kind of lied and said that you said that I was better than him and he had to make sure but he... he’s ignored... he’s rubbish.”

BRYN

“Okay, well, I’m just glad everyone’s okay, look after each.”

ALEX

“Oh, it’s great. We go... we go hunting now.. It’s nice to sort of spend a time. It’s alright. The weather’s been a bit rubbish but it’s picking up now.”

BRYN

“Yeah, we think we may have... anyway, I shouldn’t say too much I guess.”

ALEX

“Oh, no, right, yeah.”

BRYN

“Who else...?”

ALEX

“Oh, sorry, I’m not a zombie neither.”

BRYN

“Good. Did... what about the others? What Emeka and Ed and Einstein and Beaming and did they all go off?”

ALEX

“Right. So, Einstein is now doing stuff at the old house but we don’t really... I don’t really know what.”

BRYN

“Sure.”

ALEX

“And then there’s... Emeka headed off with Vesseek.”

BRYN

“They headed back to Kenya?”

ALEX

“I don’t know. I think they said something about like going to help. Last I heard they were like getting involved in Cairo but then I don’t really know what’s happening there.”

BRYN

“Okay. Okay. Do you know Ed’s headed off to?”

ALEX

“Yeah, he’s still with us. He mostly just sort of... he doesn’t really do much, if I’m honest but he’s here, you know.”

BRYN

“Ooh, but it’s good that he’s with you, that’s nice.”

ALEX

“Yeah, golden boy’s alright 25:31 ??.”

BRYN

“Yeah, he’s lovely and he’ll be able to look after you all as well in case a...”

ALEX

“I mean, I’m going to be honest, I spend a lot of time looking after him.”

BRYN

“Yes, I mean, it goes both ways.”

ALEX

“Yeah, it’s actually Ismail’s job but he just doesn’t do it.”

BEN

At this stage, I feel like I want to make a perception check, cause Hamid shouldn’t be doing this but I didn’t want to like shut him completely.”

ALEX

No, absolutely, absolutely.

BEN

That's 21. "Hamid, who are you talking to?"

ALEX

"Who's that? Is that a zombie?"

BRYN

"That's one of my friends. No, it's fine."

BEN

"Hamid?"

BRYN

"Yes?"

BEN

"Who are you talking to?"

BRYN

"My brother."

ALEX

“Hi.”

BEN

“How? With what?”

BRYN

“I’m just making sure that they’re okay.”

BEN

“Look, we’re not supposed to contact anyone.”

BRYN

“I’ve got to go now, Ishaq. Thank you for letting me know everyone’s okay.”

ALEX

“No, wait, wait, wait, you’ve got to tell me how to do the lights thing.”

BRYN

“No, I’ve got to go.”

ALEX

“No...” Break from the connection.

BEN

“Hamid, we’re not supposed to be talking to anyone. Communication is going to be compromised. You know the state the world is in. Just... if you want to send a message let’s do it through Wilde.”

BRYN

“Look, I...”

BEN

“Look, there is a structure for a reason. We have handlers for a reason. We have limited points of contact for a reason. We are a cell for a reason.”

ALEX

With two Ls.

(laughter)

BRYN

“We didn’t share anything sensitive, I just needed to know my family were okay.”

BEN

“It doesn’t matter. I know... I understand but it doesn’t matter if you didn’t ... things could be located, right? We have powerful people/things working against us.”

BRYN

“It’s no different than a sending spell. It’s actually quite difficult to interfere with those.”

BEN

“You’re... the mage but then so is Wilde and so is Curie and so is Einstein and I have been told by all of them that shouldn’t be doing this, okay? So, I’m sorry, but I am listening to the people who are organising this thing.”

BRYN

“Look, I was dragged to Japan before I had a chance to see if my family were okay, before I had a chance to give my brother back to them after he’d been taken for 18 months. I just need to know.”

BEN

“I am... yeah, I know.”

BRYN

“I won’t do it again.”

BEN

“Good. I understand and I’m sorry that’s the situation but that’s how it is now. Everyone is having to deal with this, alright?”

HELEN

Azu rides upon Topaz and doesn't say anything but just goes in between Zolf and Hamid.

ALEX

Bear in mind, your camel's huge and their horses are small so this is...

(laughter)

ALEX

This is a hairy meaty wall that starts to appear between the two.

BEN

I will look up and try and make eye contact with Azu.

LYDIA

Stink of celestial camel.

BEN

I will like... I give you a sorrowful like, "I apologise" look. I'm not being like glaring or anything like that. I'm just like, "I am really sorry but..."

HELEN

Azu looks disappointed.

BEN

I look more sad and just, yeah, and look away.

HELEN

Okay.

ALEX

It's real difficult doing like artful cinematography in an audit podcast, isn't it?

(laughter)

BEN

Yeah.

LYDIA

The frame moves 0.5 degrees to the right. There's a twitch in the left eyebrow but the right holds firm.

ALEX

We violate the 180 degree angle just for a moment to show Hamid's... yeah, it's fine.

LYDIA

Gets a few lessons.

ALEX

I am happy to jump ahead to arriving at the inn unless anyone else is like wanting to cover anymore chatter. I mean...

HELEN

Since Azu is now next to Zolf, she is going to say, "So, you kept saying we had to talk about something, dealing with feelings."

BEN

"Yeah."

HELEN

"Do you want to do that now."

ALEX

Both of you give me a perception check.

LYDIA

Feelings appear.

ALEX

A wild feeling of his.

BRYN

I cast fireball.

HELEN

25.

BEN

20.

ALEX

Okay, yeah, both of you notice that Carter's clearly caught wind of conversations happening and has been slowly pulling his horse a little bit further and further and further. So, Barnes is still up front and Carter's just been reigning in more and more and more to start listening to everyone.

HELEN

"Not you, Carter."

ALEX

He doesn't respond.

BEN

I... de-de didledy... yeah, I get something smaller and in consequential and throw it at the back of Carter's head.

ALEX

Carter slaps it like it's a mosquito, takes a moment and then his horse starts picking up its pace and starts catching up with Barnes again.

(laughter)

BEN

“Yeah, look, I don't know, Azu, it was tense in there, I just...”

HELEN

“I still feel quite tense.”

BEN

“Yeah, I can understand why. But...”

HELEN

“You're not good at talking for someone who says we need to talk.”

(laughter)

ALEX

Aw I've got to take a break there. Yes!

Break

ALEX

And welcome back. So, I believe you were just... just burning, just third degrees all over the place.

BEN

“You’re not wrong. The... pushing things down, feeling that they hurt, ignoring that kind of stuff, I’m just... I... I might be speaking out of turn, I’m sorry if I am but I’ve been there and it’s not a good place to be and I want to make sure that, you know, you’re not there or if you are then, you know, you can talk to me if you want. I might not be able to talk but I can listen. That’s... I ain’t going to force a conversation.”

HELEN

“Alright. You had a difficult relation with Poseidon, didn’t you?”

BEN

“Yeah.”

HELEN

“Um... I was going to... I wanted to be a High Priestess of Aphrodite, apparently, a long time ago now and I don’t know if there’s a... something to be a Priestess of.”

BEN

Do I know this, actually? Like, because I’ve been... I’ve been living in the world. Is the Cult of Aphrodite still around?

ALEX

Yes,. The Cult of Aphrodite have mostly been taking on humanitarian elements of the sort of organisation. All of the cults, all of the temples were already semi-independent from Meritocratic rule anyway. So, as Meritocratic rules started to breakdown, they pretty much just stepped into fill the breach in various ways and, yeah, the Cult of Aphrodite are still maintaining hospitals and have also been helping with things like relocation of civilians and provisions in terms of like making sure people are fed and so. They do have a significant presence on the warfront in terms like medical aid and so on. But for the most part, they are one of the temples that's more present on the civilian side.

BEN

Are we kind of going back to the sort of system that Grizzop and Sasha saw in Rome?

BRYN

Not relevant...

ALEX

Like... 31:13 ??, yes.

BEN

Yeah, okay. "They are still doing good work. They exist. They're still around, you can still do that if you want."

HELEN

“Yes, but I feel like since I started trying to, you know... I started this because I wanted to save the world and do some good and I feel like I’ve not been doing that very well. So, maybe...”

BEN

“We can only try.”

BRYN

“Azu, that’s... you’ve done lots of good, Azu.”

HELEN

“I don’t know. I couldn’t save everyone.”

BEN

“You can never save everyone. Like, that’s... this is where I was. I mean Hamid can attest to that. I don’t know, Azu, it sounds like you still have faith and that’s good.”

HELEN

“I’ll always have faith but I don’t know always what to do with it.”

BEN

“You’re best. Just try, that’s all you need.” Like, that is it. You’re not going to solve everything, no one’s going to do everything that they want to do. But the point is they try, especially at a time like this. We need people who just keep going, who keep trying, who, you know...”

BRYN

“And Sasha and Grizzop, that’s not your fault, Azu. That was a spell malfunctioning that you had no control over. Neither of us could have done anything differently.”

HELEN

“We didn’t have to go.”

BRYN

“We did have to go.”

HELEN

“Neither of them really wanted to go.”

BEN

“I didn’t know Grizzop but I knew Sasha and if she went somewhere, she decided to go there, like that’s her actions. She made that... everyone chooses and makes risks. We’re in this business. This is a... it’s a deadly business. This happens and... it doesn’t undo the things that those people did.”

HELEN

Azu is quiet. She's having a think.

BEN

Zolf is also quiet.

ALEX

Okay, roll initiative. Kidding.

LYDIA

Cel is way off like they're chat with probably at Barnes.

ALEX

You can be having a chat at Barnes, Carter will be actively trying to talk to you.

LYDIA

Oh, yeah, let's fine.

BRYN

And Cel doesn't hate Carter.

(laughter)

LYDIA

Cel doesn't yet so they're just sort of like, "How... how much? How have you been travelling round the area? That's... yeah, that's good."

ALEX

Carter's mostly interested in the stuff you've seen on the island.

LYDIA

Oh, yeah.

ALEX

It is mechanical? Anything like that.

LYDIA

Oh, yes, Cel will absolutely love to talk about the mechanics and would no reason to be suspicious or worried about sharing that information.

ALEX

That's fine, yeah. He's...

LYDIA

Unless say Barnes is there and says, "Do not share information", which I am guessing could be something that he does because 34:57 ??.

ALEX

Eventually, yeah. Eventually, yeah. At which Carter's just like, "Okay, carry on but really quietly."

LYDIA

"Yeah, 35:08 ?? sort of signals that it was 35:08 ??."

ALEX

There's something about size, certainly the words small and insignificant aren't the correct words. It bounces off Carter's head from Barnes. He accelerates next to Barnes and stays quiet.

LYDIA

Cel winds down. But it's not part of like... cannot hear the other conversation.

ALEX

Yeah.

BEN

Well, I feel like given this and we've probably finished.

LYDIA

Oh, right. So, trotting on.

BRYN

I'd like to accelerate my mount up so I'm riding next to Cel for a little while.

LYDIA

"Hello, buddy."

BEN

35:34 ?? shuffling.

BRYN

"Cel, I just wanted to..."

LYDIA

"Oh, it's another heart to heart. Love these. Great."

(laughter)

BRYN

"I know you already had a chat with Zolf, I just... I don't know if you guys talked about what's going to come next or what your plans are because I know you've got your village and you've got Jasper and your workshop and I just wanted to see what you're... once we've gone through the isolation what you're thinking about doing next I guess. I mean, if you feel like sharing, obviously you don't have to."

LYDIA

Cel looks down at their hands and looks extremely upset. “I’ll be honest, little buddy, I... I think I’ve got a lot to think about. I...” There’s a pause and that’s unusual. “You know, I spent years keeping my village safe and not fighting back and, I mean, that’s something I told Mr Smith is that, you know, I could... I could maybe have gone in there, I probably have died, but like I could have followed them, I could have gone back and I maybe... I could have ended this a long time ago. If I... if I had gone in...”

BRYN

“That’s a huge job for one person.”

LYDIA

“Yeah, I... I can be a huge person.”

BRYN

“That’s true.”

LYDIA

“You know, I...”

BRYN

“I mean, I’ve been constantly impressed with everything’s done but it’s always easier to work as part of a team.”

LYDIA

“I can be very big and, you know, all that time he was hurting all those kobolds and all those people that I was scaring off and I was so confident that they were leaving, they were going back to do more terrible things and so I don’t know if looking after my village is enough but, little buddy, I am older than... I am old for... maybe not for a halfling and maybe not for a dwarf. I have seen a lot and I... you know, getting involved does often hurt... does often hurt people more than...”

BRYN

(sighs) “I mean...”

LYDIA

“Not getting involved is good, you know, and that you can... it’s very easy to become the monster, you know, when you get involved.”

BRYN

“Well... I...”

LYDIA

“I’ve been the monster before, little buddy. I have been thing.”

BRYN

“I know... I know what you mean. I’ve had... I’ve had to do stuff that...”

LYDIA

“No, I cannot overestimate like over how literal I am being when I say I have become a monster.”

BRYN

“Oh... oh, okay.”

LYDIA

“I mean, morally as well that’s complex but like I mean quite literally.”

BRYN

“Well, I’m sorry, I don’t know what you’ve been through. I just know that...”

LYDIA

“Oh, what I’ve been...”

BRYN

“...we’ve been is, you know, we’ve... it’s been hard and I know what... there’s been a lot of costs. I mean, I... I’ve lost friends, I’ve lost family and I’ve...”

LYDIA

“Yeah, that’s all stuff I don’t want to do again either, you know. Like that’s a... yes, yes, yes. If you’re mates with mercenaries, yeah, you go to a lot of... well, you don’t go to a lot of funerals usually because there isn’t much to bury but you go to a lot of memorial services and sometimes because things are

complicated, those people turn up again. Because, you know, it's quite hard to keep track of other mercenaries. So, you know, that can be nice when that happens. But, usually, lots of memorial services and lots of not knowing and lots of... but on the other hand it maybe that I don't have that much of a choice."

BRYN

"Well, I think you do and you should have a choice. You know, I... for me, I would choose to, despite everything I've lost, I would do it again because I honestly believe that what we've done has mattered but I can't make that decision for you. I just want you to know that either way, you know, you're..."

LYDIA

"Yeah."

BRYN

"We'll be here to help, whatever you decide."

LYDIA

"You know, I just want you to know that whenever I refer to you as little buddy, I mean, I'm referring to the size of your heart."

BRYN

Hamid... Hamid is really touched by that.

(laughter)

BRYN

Like, he actually... he actually starts to well up a bit.

BEN

And he says he doesn't like Harrison Campbell.

(laughter)

LYDIA

That's the thing, he's such a hack.

BRYN

Hamid's a snob, man.

BEN

I know.

BRYN

If he could let himself like Harrison Campbell he would.

ALEX

Shall I press on?

LYDIA

Yeah, yeah. That conversation probably... like it's got to the end, basically.

BRYN

Yeah, they probably make awkward small talk a tiny bit more and then drifted to silence I guess.

LYDIA

"Yeah, so tell me about how when you fly. Do you like 40:18?? wings?"

BRYN

Oh, yeah, we'll go into that, of course..

LYDIA

"Do you like my wings?"

BRYN

I'm going to jump ahead to the...

BRYN

"Very, very much."

ALEX

I am going to jump ahead to the inn, which is the benefit of the horses is that you have made slightly better time but the thing is is going with a horse isn't...

unless you're literally like galloping along, given the nature of the roads and so on...

BRYN

It's a long journey, it's about the same speed.

ALEX

It goes from like the wee hours to just late that you get there. So, it's coming on at say... on the clock it will say 11pm or something or something like that. The sun's gone down, it's a nice quiet evening for the first time in god knows how when. How when? How long. And, yeah, you pull in towards the inn. The innkeeper is made aware clearly of you and steps out to see you all, gives a call and then a stable hand come out to take the horses back and you all see from one of the side doorways, one of the sliding panels is aside and Wilde's kind of there sort of hands on hips with the light... the warm light behind him, gives you all a nod and then gestures to the...

LYDIA

"No one suspects the cell keeper, keeps us all in our cells, uh? What if the innkeeper got veined?"

HELEN

"Mm mm mm. Is no one thinking about that?"

BEN

“Well, the innkeeper hadn’t been you know, in contact with a brain that’s literally got... and then a cleric with blue veins what blew up and probably got all over us because of like some kind of fine mist.”

BRYN

“I mean, our... our safety mechanism for everyone who’s here is they’ve all been with each other. Now I guess if every single person in this tavern and village is infected then we are preverbally screwed. But I think we have to assume that on some level they’ve kept each other safe.”

BEN

“Wilde, three things. First of all, leave our stuff alone. Secondly, let us all go have a shower. Thirdly, put us in the cell.”

BYRN

“Oh, and some food, please.”

BEN

“And that.”

LYDIA

“Ooh, and some tea, please.”

BEN

“And that.”

ALEX

“You’ll need to be supervised in the baths.”

BEN

“Obviously.”

HELEN

“How supervised?”

ALEX

“Well, 42:17 ?? supervised.”

HELEN

“42: 17 ?? standing up...okay, sorry.” Azu does what I just did which is put her hands on her hips and look at Wilde like, I just want a bubble bath. That kind of expression.

ALEX

Wilde gestures to the baths and basically says, “Go, you’ll be supervised, no one’s going to be acting inappropriately but I don’t know what to say. You have the choice between a bath that is supervised or no bath at all.”

HELEN

“Then I’ll take the bath.”

ALEX

And there we are.

BEN

“Wilde, man.”

ALEX

For Zolf’s benefit you know that anytime people disappear and come back, he is cold as stone until they’re proven otherwise, just nothing. It’s like a switch goes off.

BEN

I will still say it but know I am not going to get any reaction.

ALEX

Yeah. Do you all go have a bath?”

BRYN

Yes.

LYDIA

Splash in a bath.

ALEX

Okay, cool.

BEN

Yeah, we have been drowned, rotted and just covered in blood, miserable, absolutely miserable.

HELEN

I got that sea salt sand thing.

BEN

Mm mm.

BRYN

You finally get the last of the goo out of your ear.

HELEN

Uuuurgh.

BRYN

From when you were inside the goolam

BEN

Yeah, forgot about that.

HELEN

Oh, god, yes. Absolutely covered.

ALEX

So, yeah, baths are fine but you are still led down into the cell underneath the inn at this point. It's a little bit more crowded with this many people.

LYDIA

Yeah, you said it was barely big enough for like me and Azu Hamid.

ALEX

Yeah. So, as you're led down, Barnes, Wilde and Carter seem to be having a hushed discussion until eventually they go, "Right, we're not really able to do this properly. Please don't come higher than the trapdoor but we'll leave the gate... we'll leave the cell gate open. We're going to have to, we can't fit you all in."

HELEN

"Oh, thank you."

ALEX

"We'll try and do what we can."

BEN

“We’ll self-monitor. If anyone’s got **guy 44:05 ??** it probably won’t be all of us.”

LYDIA

“By the end it probably would be all of us.”

ALEX

“That’ll have to do.”

BEN

“Well, then we’ll know if rolling waves.”

BRYN

“If you keep the door locked from outside and it will have to do.”

ALEX

“It will have to do.” Wilde just sort gives Zolf and Barnes and Carter a... and then heads back up and just closes the trapdoor above him, leaving you all sort of in a room that’s...

BEN

Are Barnes and Carter with us?

ALEX

Barnes and Carter are with you, yeah.

BEN

Really?

HELEN

But they've been away from us and from Wilde.

BEN

Oh, okay, fair enough.

ALEX

Basically, Barnes and Carter are with you as well.

BEN

Oh, I thought because, you know, blue vein goo brain."

LYDIA

"Oh, no, a week with Howard Carter."

BEN

"Yeah."

LYDIA

“Mmmm.”.

ALEX

And I think with that fate worse than death, you could have... you could have just succumbed to the Shoin Institute but no, instead let's leave you in a cell, an overcrowded cell with Carter the blood incompetent who can't roll higher than a four and the rest, and we'll see what happens there.

[Show Theme - Outro]

ALEX

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