

RQG – 164 – Let’s Talk

Content Warnings

- X
- X

[Show Theme - Intro]

ALEX

Hello and welcome to the Rusty Quill Gaming podcast, episode 164. I'm your host and GM Alex Newall and with me today, I have

BEN

Ben Meredith

BRYN

Bryn Monroe

LYDIA

Lydia Nicholas

HELEN

And Helen Gould

Rusty Quill Gaming – 164 – Let's Talk

ALEX

And who are you playing?

BEN

Zolf Smith

BRYN

Hamid Saleh Haroun al-Tahan

LYDIA

Cel Sidebottom

HELEN

And Azu.

ALEX

And how y'all doing? Is everyone ok?

HELEN

Yeah

BEN

We actually had a sit down and a drink so that was nice.

Rusty Quill Gaming – 164 – Let's Talk

ALEX

I hate it!

HELEN

Little relaxation.

ALEX

I hate it!

BRYN

Down time. Down time!

HELEN

Endless down time.

ALEX

And now there will be only up. Up time.

BEN

Well we are in the sky so I hope the up time is continuing until we're at Svalbard.

BRYN

Yeah what standard did we build this ship to? Is it 95% up time, 99% up time?

ALEX

Well that is what we find out today.

BEN

Hooray!

ALEX

I am, unless people want not to, going to jump ahead a little bit beyond, was the conversation kind of wrapped. It was from my end but I want to check in with people?

BRYN

I don't think we remember well enough to say!

ALEX

Then let's say it petered off into an awkward silence unless someone actively stops me.

BRYN

No we probably had a pleasant remaining conversation and we've all bonded a little but I reckon.

HELEN

I like to think that we had a nice darts competition and everyone had a nice fun time.

BRYN

Yep.

ALEX

Helen can you roll me a D20 on everyone's behalf so it falls on your shoulders if it goes badly.

HELEN

Yeah

ALEX

Thanks

HELEN

5

(laughing)

ALEX

It does eventually peter out into silence. But not a hostile silence.

BEN

Hooray!

ALEX

Just an awkward silence

BEN

That is a big improvement!

ALEX

Just a silence of people who aren't enjoying each other's company.

LYDIA

Oh damn Alex!

HELEN

I dunno. I think some of us are enjoying each other's company.

ALEX

Yeah but the problem is that it's not everyone, that's what makes it taper off. I suspect there's a lot of that, and do you remember that time in Rome when blah, blah and at least half of the people there are like no. I don't remember that.

LYDIA

Cel and Zolf were having their own awkward conversation and that, I think, lapsed into comfortable silence.

BEN

Yeah we're doing our own thing.

LYDIA

Yeah

BEN

You can't take that away from us!

ALEX

So we are going to be picking up, I would say, probably midday the next day.

Ok. So we are still well on our way, we are definitely out past the Japan mainland at this point, out past the ocean and probably actually back onto the continent effectively I think.

BRYN

Yeah because we're several days into the flight at this point aren't we?

ALEX

Yeah, yeah, you're definitely going to be over landmasses at this point,. Mostly mountains.

BRYN

Yeah because the conversation at the end of the previous episode was on the evening of what, day four?

ALEX

Yeah about that. So yeah you're going to be getting over mountains at this point and unpopulated regions.

BEN

Yeah I forgot we're going to the World Magic Behemoth place.

LYDIA

Wooo!

HELEN

Oh no those are really...

LYDIA

I haven't been to these places and I haven't even listened to that side quest so I'm excited to encounter...I've heard tale of giant bums.

ALEX

There's no such thing as giant bums.

BEN

Definitely not.

HELEN

Definitely bum holes.

BEN

Yeah we definitely found a giant anus.

(laughing)

Alex made very sure.

LYDIA

Wait there's the hole but not the buttocks. That's terrifying

ALEX

I was extremely disappointed that you didn't find a specific cave and then try to light a torch in order to see deeper inside.

(laughing)

BEN

Oh Alex!

BRYN

You're a monster. And actual monster.

BEN

No you're a child!

HELEN

Absolutely terrible.

ALEX

That's what happens when I'm doing stuff off the cuff.

BRYN

Children are monsters in my experience.

BEN

That's fair.

ALEX

So we are at midday the following day and you're all going about your normal duties, as I said, your hardcore triple shifts has now kind of been finished with because you're all up to a basic, broadly acceptable level of competency I guess. And as a result I am going to ask...you are now in what can best be described as normality until stuff happens. You all discuss the kind of things that you wanted to be doing during this trip. I'm going to openly state from now is your first opportunity. So if anyone has anything they actively want to pursue that is not externally prompted, let's leave it at that, now is the time to let me know.

HELEN

What if it's midday and we're doing our tasks and Azu's on lookout so she's just going to be up there having a little sunbathe.

(laughing)

ALEX

Ok.

HELEN

But also looking but also sunbathing.

LYDIA

Cel might climb up and ask how you're doing. If that's...I say that in a query voice in that Cel would look up and sort of be like – does Azu look...they're not quite...Azu not sleeping. I could climb up but I don't want to wake her up but you know, I do have some very exciting mechanical news about the engine which you would probably love. I mean who wouldn't. So, yeah, let's see. Hey Azu.

HELEN

Hello.

LYDIA

Mind if I join you?

HELEN

Yes. Azu attempts to make sense. Is there an equivalent of a crow's nest or am I just like...like what am I?

ALEX

There is the equivalent to a crow's nest however for two of you to be in there it's going to be cramped but not untenable.

HELEN

Ok, Azu attempts to make more space.

ALEX

It's spiky on the outside as is all the rest of the ship.

HELEN

Easier to climb on.

LYDIA

Yeah. Like I mean if you're going to spend significant amounts of time up here and you know, like, I could work on making it a little more comfortable. There's a few different things we could do to expand...I wonder if I could make it into a kind of expandable bed type option. Like the whole crow's nest.

HELEN

Oh I probably...well I won't be sleeping up here. I'm paying lots of attention on the clouds.

LYDIA

Ah I see. There is a conflict of interest between sunbathing and watching.

HELEN

Do you want to...do you want to look at the clouds? That one looks like a rabbit.

LYDIA

Aw, yeah that's a lovely game.

ALEX

Everyone give me a perception check.

BEN

Everyone, not just the cloud watchers.

ALEX

No, you know what, you know what, I'm going to reward some cloud watching. Just the cloud watchers.

LYDIA

25

HELEN

24

ALEX

Cel you notice that Siggif is quietly sidling away from his normal duties to do with monitoring the rigging and is nipping off down to what is like the hold/quarters and so on below decks.

LYDIA

I'm trying to have a nice conversation. I think Cel is not going to act on that information because they're here to ask Azu how they're doing.

ALEX

That is an acceptable, acceptable...

LYDIA

Cel doesn't understand enough about how ships work to question an experienced shipwright...ship sailor....

ALEX

If this was a choose your own adventure story you would turn to page 67 and it'd be something like, and as the flames claim all of your compatriots you wonder...no you're fine. It's all good.

LYDIA

I just...I mean I just wondered how you are in general and that I appreciate what you...I saw what you were doing with the competition and I thought that that was...I wanted to apologise for not joining in. I had some...I was not in a good space but, you know, I hope you had fun.

HELEN

I did. I did. Thank you. I'm feeling a bit homesick actually with the seeing...because it's sunny and high up.

LYDIA

Oh. Is that what your home's like?

HELEN

Yeah. Well yeah sunny and high up. I used to work on a farm so I would be in the sun all the time and there were lots of people who I cared about and who cared about me and it was safe and nothing went on fire or was trying to kill me.

LYDIA

It's weird how that kind of becomes strange. Do this kind of work and you forget...yeah I get it. It's why I was so reluctant to leave the village. Like when you find that, you've got to hold on, you know.

HELEN

Yes I mean technically it's not...I've not been away for very long, in my time. In real time it's been, you know, nearly two years but in my time it's only been a few months but it does feel like two years which is strange don't you think.

Yes. I mean you've been away from your home for a long time. How do you cope with...

LYDIA

I mean I've been away from...well I mean it depends what a home is, right? You make homes. I had a childhood home that has been a long time...it's been a lot longer since...I've been away for that a lot longer than I was actually there if you understand what I mean. I was about...oh about 25/30 maybe. It's so long ago. I was young anyway and I've lived in a lot of places since. Some of them have felt like home and some of them didn't and some I still miss. I think it's the feeling of home you end up missing, not the specific place but...

HELEN

And it's the people. You know, sometimes I feel like if I had the right people around I would feel at home again.

ALEX

Speaking of people. Everyone give me a perception check.

BEN

Oh gawd. Everyone this time?

LYDIA

29

BEN

A natural 20 giving me a total of 30.

BRYN

16

HELEN

23

ALEX

Ok carry on for now. I'll deal with that later.

LYDIA

Oh no, the smoke is really rising isn't it.

(laughing)

It's strange how long you can miss people. It can be so long...I try to tell myself that they still with you in your heart but the thing is that's not the same as being able to share a joke.

HELEN

Yes I know what you mean. I don't know. I've lost people before but it was all natural causes or accidents. I've never had people taken away.

LYDIA

No I...mm – this is where things are going to get into an awkward silence. I mean it's a comfortable silence maybe, a sharing of souls but not something that makes good audio.

HELEN

That's ok.

ALEX

Thank god that we've got soundscapes. So let's leave this in real time for the next 15. God I love these episodes, they're so easy to do!

(laughing)

HELEN

Azu is going to say – can I have a hug?

LYDIA

Oh absolutely. Yes a deep hug, they've got such long arms.

HELEN

That is why. There's no one that's been tall enough for Azu to have like a big hug.

LYDIA

It's a proper engulfing hug, especially with the fluffy gear on. You might even forget how gangly Cel is so it almost might feel like you've got a proper big bulky orc. An old friend or family.

ALEX

I suspect that Cel at the moment is kind of like a teddy bear with like a steel frame to keep it in shape on the inside. Deep inside there's a wire frame but it's mostly fluffed out into a ball.

LYDIA

It's fluff. It's fluff.

ALEX

Zolf.

BEN

Hello

ALEX

Obviously you are aware, as you're on deck because it's your job, that Cel and Azu are up there and they're doing their thing and things are ticking along quite nicely. However you do notice at some point that after, say, 15 minutes or so your suspicions are confirmed that all of the crew members who joined the ship who are not kobolds...

BEN

Oh bloody hell.

ALEX

...are now not on deck doing their duties. I will give you the addition though that their duties were make sure this does not go wrong. It probably won't but do it anyway. Not anything that's like unattended the ship's gonna explode.

BEN

Uh huh. Am I doing anything that if left unattended the ship's gonna explode?

ALEX

Mostly making sure that other people don't leave things unattended so that the ship doesn't explode.

BEN

Cool I'm gonna go do my job.

ALEX

Good. Would you care to be specific about which manner of your job you're doing?

BEN

I'm going to look for where all of the crew have gone because they should be attending things and doing their job.

ALEX

Can you give me a perception check please.

BEN

Ah. I already gave you a bloody critical success. What do you want from me?

HELEN

More successes.

ALEX

There is a difference between spotting there's a problem and finding where the problem is. Oh no, there's a leak is not the same as I've found the leak.

BEN

Yeah you'd think that would bundle up with a critical but a 20.

ALEX

So you head below decks, digging your way...

BEN

Ooh. I lied, I lied, I lied sorry. It's a 19.

ALEX

Oh so you head below decks and fall out the bottom of the ship

(laughing)

BEN

That is a DC.

ALEX

You're fine. You head below decks, no one's in their quarters or anything and you start digging your way through the cargo hold. The cargo hold feels more full than you remember. Everything's properly stowed, everything is where it should be...

BEN

Oh for f...yeah ok.

ALEX

Your internal checklist for what kind of inventory you have, it's stowed in a way that makes it feel like there's more here than there should be.

LYDIA

Ah, where's the secret room? That has been hollowed out. I wonder

BEN

Yeah I'm going to have a look around because this is obviously suspicious.

ALEX

You find a poorly concealed cubby has been arranged in the very, very bottom back of the cargo hold where it's like someone has clearly arranged crates in such a way to make an empty space in the middle and you hear muffled conversation going inside.

BEN

Uh huh. Can I overhear...can I hear through the wall as it were.

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

Then I will listen.

ALEX

You hear something along the lines of – oh f*** [mumbling] and then on the other side you hear the voice that you recognise as Friedrich is like – true but there’s not much you can really do about that is there. [Mumbling voice]. Look I’m telling you that what it is, is what it is. [Mumbling voice]. And then you hear Kiko in there as well just very sort of calmly like – are you going to be doing this long. [Mumbling voice]. I don’t have all day. Listen I’m telling him that it’s ok. It’s just gonna have to wait it out. [Mumbling voice]

BEN

Ok I feel like at that point I’m gonna to go in because I’m magic so what the hell are they gonna do.

LYDIA

Got loads of hit points!

BEN

I’ve got loads of horrible spells. So yeah I’ll walk in.

ALEX

By walk, for you, you can walk in. Anyone else is gonna stoop but yeah you poke your head in and you find a surprisingly little plush poker den has been set up. There’s a barrel in the middle with like a, you know one of those drums where it’s like, has the thick wheels at each side for cable and so on.

LYDIA

I just need you to know very quickly that it took me so long to parse that you meant poker as in the game rather than the place that Pokémon live.

ALEX

A Pokeden!

HELEN

Yeah I thought you were going to say something to say to do with Pokémon.

BEN

A Pokeden.

ALEX

You hear a faint tune on the breeze [singing], everyone comes out and they're just really happy and healthy.

LYDIA

Yeah just Charmander going yay!

BEN

20th of the day. I'm going to become a leader.

(laughing)

ALEX

So the three of them are playing a game of poker and it appears that Siggif is losing heavily. They've got a pile of furs in there. It's pretty comfy looking and there is what's clearly a jar of hooch in the middle of the table as well and they're all just having a game of poker. And...they don't notice that you're there.

BEN

So this didn't take long did it?

ALEX

Argh, ooh. Siggif stands, hits his head and then sits back down because it's not that tall. Friedrich uses his enormous arm to sweep everything off the table in a single go making a cascade of mess and Kiko just looks at you very calm and unconcerned about the whole thing. Ah, oh sorry sir. We were just, you know, getting to know one another and making sure that everyone was...morale. Lots of morale has been raised. And Kiko just continues looking at her cards which she did not let get swept out of her hands – you could just join us.

BEN

I don't think I will. So what are you going to have to bide your time about by the way?

ALEX

Siggif just kind of looks confused – well, you know, I might have to buy my way back in so I'm gonna have to pick up some shifts because someone's cheating.

I'm not cheating. It's called maths. If you got better at it, you'd be better at the game.

BEN

So you're not thinking about doing anything that maybe you shouldn't do.

ALEX

Kiko just looks at you with a wry calculating look – what kind of thing do you think we might be doing that we're not supposed to be doing. Is there something we should know?

BEN

What kind of thing do sailors usually do that they shouldn't do on a boat?

ALEX

Drinking.

Oh well you know, maybe working too hard.

(laughing)

Kiko just kind of closes her eyes in a hmm kind of way and waits for the hypothetical question to answer itself.

BEN

So you're considering a mutiny at some point?

LYDIA

What?!

ALEX

Siggif looks just confused. Friedrich is shocked and Kiko is amused.

HELEN

Zolf you can't just ask people about a mutiny!

BEN

I'm going to invite them to my mutiny.

ALEX

Why is there a mutiny on the cards that we should know about?

Dunno about mutiny, you know, it's not a great idea.

BEN

All I'm trying to do is find out why you are in this secret poker den talking about bidding your time because I am not really convinced by the whole buying your way back in. And also you can't get extra shifts, we do the number of shifts that are needed. And also you got paid upfront. It's a fixed fee. You

Rusty Quill Gaming – 164 – Let's Talk

can't work harder to make more money. We're not in a factory. I paid you that money. Well half of it.

ALEX

Could I see you outside sir. It's a bit of delicate matter.

And Siggif's like – no I don't think you...not really sure about that. We could just carry on as we are, there's not really any...

I do really think that we should probably let him know Siggif.

BEN

Then why don't you just have a conversation with me here in front of the others.

ALEX

Very well. Siggif would you care to...

Well you know, just wondering if [mumbling]

In your own time Siggif.

Well, you know, I was just wondering if [mumbling]

BEN

Care to use words?

ALEX

Kiko is still looking at her cards and clearly getting a little bit annoyed that everything's been interrupted and is quietly picking up her chips as talking goes on and from underneath the "tables" he fancies the orc and wants to know if she's available.

(laughing)

Kiko just sits back going...

BEN

Just to be clear, Siggif's the smelly one right?

ALEX

Siggif is "sweaty tobacco chewing human (older)"

LYDIA

Oh my god Alex. Why are you such a monster?!

HELEN

Zolf you pick your words carefully!

(laughing)

ALEX

You all said you wanted things to get interesting and open dialogue options.

BRYN

We said we wanted the possibility of romance and one of the fingers on Alex's monkey paws. He has three hands.

HELEN

No but this is amazing, this is amazing.

BEN

Yeah I think Zolf will burst out laughing at that point.

ALEX

Siggif looks – told you it was a stupid thing.

HELEN

Awww!

BEN

To be fair with a bit of nuance...with a bit of nuance more in a relieved way, not this is a stupid idea way.

ALEX

Yeah Siggif doesn't really register it. Kiko gets exactly what you're getting at. Friedrich is mostly concerned that you're going to keelhaul a bunch of people from a flying ship or something.

LYDIA

Little do they know!

BEN

Right ok, fine. Good. Alright. Well bide your time, don't bide your time. Fine you deal with that. I can't exactly provide any advice in that myself. But why don't we keep the secret poker while you're actually supposed to be doing your jobs to a minimum because you do realise we're basically flying on a bomb that if you...

ALEX

True facts with Zolf!

BEN

My bedside for first mating is as good as my **doctoring**. And if we don't keep looking after the bomb, the bomb will explode and you've all been on ships before and if you don't do your seemingly innocuous jobs, something small will be missed and that will turn into something big and then we all blow up.

ALEX

Friedrich immediately stands and starts trying to shuffle out. He's a little bit lumbering but – oh no, yes of course sir. I wouldn't dream of...no of course. I'll just – he just starts to leave.

BEN

I will grab him by the collar. Say no, I'm not having bluster in here alright. This is...look, you can have recreation time, right. That's fine. Just don't do it on shift and I don't know why you have to do it under here unless you're worried that we're all gonna just take all your money away from you. I mean Friedrich have you got a racket set up here? Have you found two people that you can take money from and you don't want to play the rest of us?

ALEX

Siggif just mutters up – he's got really big hands.

BEN

Too many cards or you just remarking on the size of his hands?

ALEX

At which point Siggif looks very sidelong at Friedrich who's like – I am not cheating. It's maths! It's basic numeracy Siggif. If you just counted the numbers on the cards you would do better. Stop looking for pairs.

BEN

I mean maybe we could have a snap tournament.

ALEX

Kiko just kind of puts everything down. It's clear that she's kind of done on the whole this isn't going to happen playing cards thing. So about that mutiny then, just circling back around slightly. Is this something we should know about or should we be concerned sir?

BEN

Captain Earhart is going through some difficult times and has been...which is...ok, I'm having to ignore Lyd's reactions.

(laughing)

ALEX

Big, silent reactions like a champ.

BEN

Captain Earhart has been going through some difficult times as I'm sure you're aware and there have been some complaints so I want to make sure that those complaints aren't shared by people because if certain elements go off and we have a big fight up here that could be incredibly dangerous for all of us so I want to make sure that we land in Svalbard safely and that nobody endangers our lives unnecessarily.

ALEX

Oh well of course sir. It will be nice to return home and I'd never dream of anything...I don't think...I mean Siggif have you eve considered a mutiny? I don't think you've ever considered mutiny.

Er, you know, now and then.

BEN

Friedrich shut up and stop talking for other people. I get why – looking at Siggif – but stop talking for other people. Siggif are you considering a mutiny right now?

ALEX

Why not...

BEN

I understand. I've considered mutinies in the past. We've all been in that position.

(laughing)

HELEN

Who amongst us hasn't considered...

(laughing)

ALEX

Might mutiny against Friedrich with his massive hands.

It's not cheating Siggif! It's just maths!

Kiko's just weary – I wouldn't worry.

BEN

Ok then I won't. Good, right.

ALEX

She openly, and this is not Alex being a prick, this is a Kiko thing, mimics your tone – ok. Good, I'm glad.

BEN

Right. Fine anyway get back to your jobs. So again this bomb don't explode and we make sure it don't and then if we want to have a poker night or some kind of club let's do that. Hey Siggif, maybe if you play poker with Azu you can get to know her a bit better.

ALEX

She like poker?

BEN

Especially considering you didn't use her name.

Rusty Quill Gaming – 164 – Let's Talk

ALEX

She like poker?

BEN

I don't know. Why don't you talk to her and ask

ALEX

Is her name Azu?

BEN

Maybe find out about her interests...

ALEX

What are her interests?

(Laughing)

BEN

Talk to her...

ALEX

Does she like talking?

BEN

...about that.

ALEX

Right.

HELEN

He's a teenager

BEN

Are you taking notes?

ALEX

Yes he is

(laughing)

They're spelt wrong.

BEN

Right, well get out.

(laughing)

ALEX

Ok I'm going to end that scene there. I've had a bit of Zolf time. I've had a bit of Azu and Cel time. Hamid, I will let you know now before you ask, the

Rusty Quill Gaming – 164 – Let's Talk

kobolds are ticking along happy as Larry, no major concerns or problems and Earhart's been in her cabin all day as she is want to do.

BRYN

I'd like to seek out Wilde.

ALEX

Yeah ok. Wilde is set up in the depths of the forward bow. So like right down at the bottom but at the very, very front of the ship which is actually a really comfortable place to be in this ship because it doesn't bounce up and down. He has a little...you know from experience from the last time you were on this ship that it was a guest cabin of sorts. It's cramped but he has set up shop in there to a degree in a sort of semi bunkbed, semi desk set up and is sort of holed up in there.

BRYN

Hello Oscar.

ALEX

Hello Hamid. Problems?

BRYN

Nothing wrong Oscar. I guess you're used to people only coming to you to talk about issues they're having.

ALEX

Goes with the job.

BRYN

Well that's what I wanted to...look Oscar I know we were never close and back before everything happened it...

ALEX

Hamid I'm going to head you off here. I'm going to head you off here. I'm fine. You need to stop asking.

(laughing)

BRYN

I don't believe you Oscar. We always cared about you even if we had strange ways of showing it. And when Grizzop got to Rome, he told us about some of the things that happened to the two of you while he was still in Damascus and well when we were in Hiroshima I noticed two loops of metal around your ankles.

ALEX

Er yes.

BRYN

Are they the same anti-magic cuffs that you had in Damascus.

ALEX

That's correct, yes. It's a surprisingly hard thing to come by and we ended up having to use most of the stuff we came across on the cell in Japan so it just seemed easiest to leave them on.

BRYN

You never were able to track down the source or find out what else was happening there?

ALEX

It's one of the greatest ironies of my life that I managed to somehow still end up with a ball and chain. Ha.

BRYN

Wow!

ALEX

Yeah.

BRYN

I mean that's heart breaking for Bryn but obviously Hamid doesn't have context.

HELEN

That has like a million meanings.

LYDIA

Oh my gosh that's all the...that's all the...urgh!

BEN

Good line Alex!

LYDIA

Yep that's very Wilde. That's good. That's...argh, you...yeah...it's very good.

(laughing)

But you're also bad. You are bad!

(laughing)

ALEX

I am bad. I'm terrible. Yes it's just been necessary we never did make any luck and it's all been very interesting really. The Cult of Hades have been very absent.

BRYN

Well the fact that they existed at all means they've been working in the shadows for a long time potentially.

ALEX

When you all headed off to Rome and were removed from the picture it felt like a...I know you've never played the great game but it...after a while you start to recognise opening moves.

BRYN

The great game?

ALEX

You know the great game.

BRYN

Espionage and counter espionage.

ALEX

Basically. I mean, yes. You start to recognise opening moves when they come up and it felt like an opening move that never had a follow up. I don't know.

BRYN

Oscar I don't know how long you spent your life with magic but I know if you're anything like I am, it means something to you. To lose it for 18 months and with no end of sight that's got to have an affect on a person. It's ok to not be ok Oscar.

ALEX

Can you give me a diplomacy roll please

BRYN

Yes I can.

HELEN

Do well. Let Oscar be ok.

LYDIA

Gonna accidentally seduce him.

BRYN

32

ALEX

“Accidentally”!

(laughing)

Press on a little further knowing that you're doing well.

BRYN

I suppose in some ways you're still our boss but hierarchies don't mean as much as they used to. You're friends as well and I know...I can't imagine how

hard it's been. I don't know the details but obviously I know something happened. A betrayal of some kind and Zolf told us that when people are in quarantine you cut yourself off but that must be such a hard way to live and to lack something that I'm sure has come to be a big part of yourself during that time as well. I'm not saying I understand but I'd like to try to and I'd like to help. Maybe you've had other people look into it already but...

ALEX

Wilde starts to absentmindedly rub the scar on his face.

BRYN

We're stuck here together for the time being Oscar, the...I mean we all know that every time any of us step off this ship at any point in the future we're risking losing each other again but while we're here let some of your friends carry this burden you've been keeping with you for so long. Don't close yourself off to everything.

ALEX

Fair enough. He kind of sits back. You always like to dig Hamid. It's arguably the best and worst quality that you have.

BRYN

I've been told that before Oscar but I like to think of it as I like to help.

ALEX

Takes a deep breath and then I take a break because I can. Because it's a thing I can do.

HELEN

Who gave him that scar?!

(laughing)

LYDIA

And who gave Alex that power?

ALEX

Back in a couple of minutes.

HELEN

Arguably we all did.

ALEX

And welcome back. Wilde takes another deep breath. So that's two deep breaths in a row so it's full lung capacity so it's a big sigh when it comes out. There's no winning this Hamid, you know that right?

BRYN

This conversation? Conversations are only about half the time about winning.

ALEX

All of this Hamid.

BRYN

...at least in my experience with you.

ALEX

Oh well of course that's the case although I think half's quite an ambitious figure there Hamid. I put it closer at a quarter for you.

BRYN

Hamid chuckles as well.

ALEX

You know what I mean. Anyone with any sense that, pardon the pun, the ship sailed.

BRYN

The world has changed beyond recognition. It's even more startlingly obvious when you skip from the beginning of that to the end of that.

ALEX

All we're doing is we're buying time in the hopes that someone makes some kind of big win. I'm not aware of any big wins and I don't see an out here.

Don't tell the others obviously but...at some point you recognise that something can be an exercise in futility but it's still something.

BRYN

Are you saying you've lost hope?

ALEX

Yes. Alright goodness me maybe I should go out and spend some time in a meadow, really get to grips with myself and that kind of thing. Yes?

BRYN

That's not what I meant, Oscar, the world we live in, the meritocrats have, for nearly 2000 years have stopped bad things happening to people.

ALEX

The meritocrats are dead, dying or hiding.

BRYN

But that's my point. We, as people, have never had to face something of this level.

ALEX

What do you think the Harlequins are doing? Honestly, what do you actually think the Harlequins are doing?

BRYN

You mean in the current situation?

ALEX

Mm

BRYN

This is a war. And it's a...

ALEX

The Harlequins aren't on the front lines Hamid. That's the clerics and the paladins and the armed forces and that kind of thing. What do you think the Harlequins are doing?

BRYN

If I had to guess and bear in mind it is a guess because I haven't been here to see it and I've seen so little of the world since we came back, picking up the pieces, filling in for the organisation that the meritocrats failed to provide in the time of crisis.

ALEX

They're keeping things going so that they can salvage what can be savaged.

BRYN

Yeah they...Oscar...

ALEX

You don't salvage a ship that can be saved. Do you see what I'm saying Hamid?

BRYN

Yes. But there are still people alive in this world Oscar. This isn't about getting back what's lost, it's about defending what's still here.

ALEX

While you were gone the goal shifted from how do we win to how do we not lose so fast. What we're doing here is not a Harlequin sanctioned activity, it's a Harlequin tolerated one. I'm a kook Hamid. I'm a joke. I'm...I'm the one who's still chasing dead leads in dead cities with, admittedly until recently, dead compatriots.

BRYN

Oscar we just got a letter from a friend who died 1,800 years ago. Nothing is impossible. I was a kid lost with direction, wandering through the streets of London. I bumped into a friend from university. I was in the right place in the right time in Prague and with two other friends. I didn't do much but Kafka was stopped. Look at the people that stopped Kafka. A street kid from Other London, a goblin paladin of Artemis, the least appropriate hero you've ever met.

(laughing)

LYDIA

I don't know, think about what circles Wilde moves in.

BRYN

And me. Sometimes the unexpected happens.

ALEX

Wilde turns his back on you, this isn't interrupting you, turns his back on you, opens the shutter so that he can see out from the bow. It's not huge, it's like a little porthole thing that has a little shutter and you have a flash of your father the last time you saw him. It has the same arm on the mantle, the same look out to the horizon.

BEN

Big dad energy.

BRYN

Hamid shudders.

HELEN

Aw

ALEX

Like it's eerie. It's an eerie replica of the exact stance the last time you saw him in his office.

BRYN

When...once before as far as we know in history the world was almost covered in darkness. We don't know the details but Rome wasn't a city. It was an empire. It covered Europe, North Africa, a bunch of Asia, it wasn't the whole world but it was a significant enough portion and I mean history says that the meritocrats burned Rome but we know from Sasha's letters that she made it out and just because Rome burned it didn't mean the empire fell over instantly. I never studied history in detail but the struggles against the remnants of that empire...the...we're not getting back what we've lost but there is still a world to save Oscar and if we can find the centre of this thing and there is a centre, if we can burn that down then this does become a fight we can win and you don't need a giant army to do that. You don't need six giant dragons. We've got a team here and they're good people. Every, single one of them is a good person. Every single one of them brings a lot to our goals. You're not doing this alone. You're doing this with us.

ALEX

I never said I'm doing it alone. I work best in a pair. Or three or more, you know, whatever opportunity presents itself. You work with what you've got.

BRYN

Hamid gives a wry smile. You know I really thought I was coming down here to ask you about the cuffs and being without magic. Sorry I seem to have got off track a bit.

ALEX

Oh, er, let me summarise for you. You get used to it after a while. Foundation has come on leaps and bounds over the last couple of years. You really should look back into it and you know, when in doubt make them laugh. Woo. He does a little pathetic jazz hand.

BRYN

Hamid just smiles. You know, this kind of remote magical action does require an arcane link.

ALEX

Go on.

BRYN

An arcane link depends on its connection to the person it was taken from.

ALEX

Go on.

BRYN

People change. How much have you changed Oscar?

ALEX

Now I need you to know Hamid, you know I care about you and I...please don't repeat to the others, you are adorable when you're trying to be profound.

(laughing)

BRYN

Hamid raises a single eyebrow emphatically.

ALEX

But as wonderful as personal growth is, I'm not entirely sure it's going to overcome the weave.

BRYN

Oh. You think it's a deeper connection than that?

ALEX

What do you want from me Hamid? I don't have an answer. Yes. Tell you what, if you find a guy walking around with a locket full of my leg hair, do me a favour and take the locket and that will probably solve my problem. That's basically where I'm at. Short of that there's not really an entirely huge amount I can do.

BRYN

Fair enough. Well Oscar, as always, it was genuinely a pleasure to talk to you.
I'll be back.

ALEX

He opens the door. Maybe four out of ten conversations but that's as high as
I'm going and then closes the door.

BEN

It's a win! That's a win!

ALEX

Give me a perception check.

BRYN

19.

ALEX

You hear the sound of what you think is Wilde slumping onto a bed.

BRYN

He cracked a bunch of jokes in that conversation I'm considering that a big win
given how few he's cracked recently.

HELEN

At some point during your save the world speech I did start playing the Avengers theme tune in my head.

(laughing)

ALEX

Listen I can give nods and things but I can't lift entire lines of dialogue. Don't do that, don't give me hope. What are you doing in Japan? The list goes on. I can't...

BEN

Not Avengers but our mission is literally to cancel the apocalypse.

ALEX

Speaking of which Cel activates the giant transform the ship into a bit **mecha** button which we haven't really addressed.

BEN

Ok I would take that genre hop.

LYDIA

I was wondering when you'd ask. I literally built a character to do that.

BEN

Ironically I control the legs.

(laughing)

ALEX

Oh Bryn's gone! I give you pure gold but no a quick crack about Zolf's legs, that's right through Bryn's defences.

BRYN

That's cool. Hamid will control the wings.

BEN

Nice.

ALEX

So does anyone have an issue with me jumping time ahead to, I'm going to say the next day's evening.

BEN

Sure

HELEN

Sure. Time to...well I'm assuming it's time to chillax.

ALEX

The silences are growing less awkward and more comfortable. Darts has very much become the case de jour.

HELEN

Azu has set up a leadership board.

ALEX

However there was a minor fracas earlier in the evening because Siggif accused Friedrich of bribing one of the kobolds to deliberately bump the ship when he was throwing his darts.

HELEN

Oh dear.

ALEX

As it stands the game is ongoing and Azu, you find yourself sat next to Siggif.

HELEN

Ok sat next to the old man. Ok.

ALEX

Can you give me a sense motive.

HELEN

Ok I mean technically I should be good at this but you know, I never succeed when I need to. Where is it? Down there.

ALEX

That's the principle upon which this entire podcast is built Helen.

HELEN

Ok, ok that's not bad. That's 28.

ALEX

Siggif is sitting very close for someone who just wants to be friends.

HELEN

Hello.

ALEX

He offers you some of his chewing tobacco – I don't know if you want some, it's quite good if...

HELEN

I've never tried it actually.

ALEX

It's...

HELEN

To be polite she does take some. So do you just put it in your mouth or...

ALEX

Well you sort of chew, you know, and then when you're done on one side you move it to the other and...

HELEN

How do you know when it's done?

ALEX

Oh because, you know - he just hocks up over the side of the ship – because you want to spit and then you go again with the chewing.

HELEN

Oh!

LYDIA

This is going to require a content warning for phlegm.

ALEX

Yep.

HELEN

Er ok. Azu starts chewing tobacco

(laughing)

BEN

Azu gets a nicotine addiction and that's what she's wrestling with for the rest of the podcast.

HELEN

She makes a face because I'm assuming tobacco tastes horrible.

ALEX

Well it's a flavoured tobacco.

LYDIA

Is it bubble gum?

BEN

So, yeah, that means that Siggif is the blowing fat clouds but for this specific universe.

ALEX

Little bit. Little bit.

LYDIA

He's a vaper.

BEN

Yeah!

ALEX

You can make out paprika in there, cinnamon. Those two flavours don't go together and a third one that you can't quite place but for all you know maybe that's just the taste of chewing tobacco. It's not good. It feels like someone's gone to a lot of effort to make something that tastes bad, taste good. In which case why bother chewing tobacco in the first place.

HELEN

Er, hmmm, how long have you been doing this then?

ALEX

Oh well you know, the thing is I actually started it when I was a kid. You know, we got...

HELEN

Oh dear.

ALEX

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean it wasn't a sky ship but we got a...we were stuck out at sea, properly out at sea. Like, it's called becalmed. Like when there's no wind and then the food ran out and they started giving out the tobacco because it stops the hunger, makes it go away for a bit.

HELEN

Oh dear.

ALEX

Oh yeah. Well it's a different time now.

HELEN

Well hopefully none of us will go hungry enough on this ship to need all of your tobacco. She spits it overboard. Did I do it right?

ALEX

Well you kind of wanna, you want to throw your chin out a bit when you do, you get more distance. I'll show you if you like.

HELEN

Oh go on then.

ALEX

He catches in quite close, puts his arm around your shoulder and then tries to show you how to spit better.

HELEN

How tall is he?

ALEX

Not. I say shoulder. It kind of starts out at like mid torso and then his hand has to keep going up until his arm is basically elbow locked but he manages to get his hand to shoulder.

HELEN

Ok Azu has been trying to be polite but now she's like oh dear, oh dear. So she turns and looks down at him, not in a condescending way, just physically. She says, so I'm a paladin of Aphrodite.

ALEX

He raises his eyebrows – alright.

HELEN

But...I think – and she removes his arm from her shoulder – that we would be best as friends for now.

ALEX

Give me a sense motive.

HELEN

Oh no, I've broken an old man's heart.

BRYN

If you check replay you can see the exact moment his heart breaks.

(laughing)

LYDIA

Just basically all adult human males...well all adult humans are old to Azu, right?

BEN

That's true.

LYDIA

Like the age gap of like a 25 year old and Azu is still kind of inappropriate. So like the idea of like a 50 year old.

ALEX

It's odd.

HELEN

I mean so like in her eyes he is early twenties-ish but I want to make it clear that she is not in any frightened or intimidated because she could f***ing snap this guy. Ooh I swore, I swore! Sorry!

(laughing)

BEN

But you're right, she can f***ing snap this guy!

HELEN

Anyway that was a 22 on the sense motive.

ALEX

You see him make a really solid attempt at – oh no that was never, oh no I'm sorry you think that. Oh no, god, no. Ha, ha, ha. No...I just...oh that's a very...I'm sorry, I'll just... - he starts.

Friedrich comes over, hands on the darts and goes – come on you big loser, give it a go.

And he's like – no I think I'm gonna just go.

Oh you can't go, it's your turn.

No, I...

HELEN

We can still play darts.

ALEX

Oh of course you play darts. I'm just going...

HELEN

Oh but...

ALEX

He goes below decks.

HELEN

Ok Azu looks at Friedrich and she's like – that might be awkward for a little while.

ALEX

Oh I wouldn't especially worry, he's awkward in most situations. He won't notice the difference.

HELEN

Well I think I might. Hmm

(laughing)

ALEX

So...

HELEN

I hope I didn't hurt his feelings.

ALEX

I mean you...I mean no, no. I don't think so. No.

HELEN

I'm going to roll a sense motive on him to see if he's lying to me.

ALEX

No, no...

LYDIA

Surprise! Yes

HELEN

That's a 28.

ALEX

Let me tweak my deliveries slightly. No, no, no, no, no, yes, yes probably.

(laughing)

But...I mean, when you reach a certain age in life rejection becomes sort of normal so he'll probably be ok eventually.

HELEN

Oh I hope not

BEN

Blooming 'eck

LYDIA

Yeah! Dang!

HELEN

I mean I'm still quite young but, you know...

ALEX

Oh not you! No, not you. I just mean that if Siggif had a coin for every time Siggif has been rejected he would not be owing me money.

(laughing)

I mean honestly...

LYDIA

Is this a charisma -2 character

(laughing)

ALEX

Friedrich starts leaning in a little bit more. Let's be honest, I mean, come on, you know, he's not so much a fixer upper as a, you know, burn it down and start again.

(laughing)

He's lovely, you know, but sometimes you have to recognise that there's woodworm in the foundation and you just have to leave it to fall down and that's ok.

HELEN

I'm sure, and you can tell him this, I'm sure he will make someone very happy but...

ALEX

Oh yes, I'm...oh yes. There's someone for everyone.

HELEN

Yes

ALEX

There was this older woman who was back home at Svalbard she was...

HELEN

Oh?

ALEX

Oh yeah she was a...she was lonely for a long, long time but then another fellow, he lost his wife and they ended up being together for about eight months before one of them died. Yeah.

(laughing)

HELEN

Well at least they had a happy end of life I suppose.

ALEX

Oh no, no it was terrible.

HELEN

Oh!

ALEX

It was a...oh god, I tell you what, the way they died. I'm going to end this conversation here.

HELEN

Azu's face falls more and more as the story goes on.

ALEX

Friedrich does not know how to stop talking. And exclusively steers conversation the worst direction imaginable.

HELEN

Ok

ALEX

You now know this about him.

HELEN

Thank you. That's very helpful. Is anyone going to come and rescue Azu?

LYDIA

Cel will come and rescue you.

HELEN

Thank you!

ALEX

And the thing is a lot of people...

LYDIA

Hey Azu! I think it's your time to throw some darts.

HELEN

Oh is it? Oh very sorry, ok.

LYDIA

It absolutely is. Possibly forever. However long you need to throw darts for. You take some time doing that.

ALEX

Oh no of course, of course. Cel you...you'd probably find this story interesting as well.

LYDIA

I don't think I would. I've got lots of things to do.

HELEN

Why don't you come and watch me throw some darts?

LYDIA

I'd love to. Azu's technique is an incredible work of art to view and I think I'm going to focus my entire energies on that. Thank you very much for everything.

HELEN

Yes thank you. Thank you as well. Thank you.

LYDIA

Oh you're absolutely fine – Cel with hands actually on Azu's shoulders because right height, gently steering her away like – you ok. I heard a lot about death and I just don't know why they would inflict that on a person and the chewing tobacco rather, the chewing is worse than the death. I don't...or maybe it is.

HELEN

Have you ever tried chewing tobacco?

LYDIA

I have tried most things.

(laughing)

I have a lot better recommendations than chewing tobacco.

ALEX

I love legally defensible statements!

HELEN

Well I didn't like that but you know the older gentleman was, I think, making eyes at me.

LYDIA

Aw. He was ok about that? You're ok? Is he your type? I lose track slightly...

HELEN

No

LYDIA

Ok

HELEN

No but he's fine. He's...lovely.

LYDIA

I mean the chewing tobacco would...

HELEN

I knew I hurt his feelings and then Friedrich started talking about death.

ALEX

I'm going to say both of you are leaning over the side of the ship at this point looking out if that's ok.

LYDIA

You know there's something I believe...you know I am open and interested in pretty much...you know, like I've had relationships across genders and species but the one thing it's chewing tobacco. It's the one...that's the line. There's a definite line around that that you then step back from and then throw an explosive across the line.

(laughing)

HELEN

Please don't explode Siggif.

LYDIA

Oh ok, since you asked nicely.

HELEN

Aw.

ALEX

As your conversation sort of wraps up, Kiko comes over to the side of the ship with you.

HELEN

Hello.

ALEX

Well that was horrendously awkward just on every level. How are we doing?

HELEN

Well I mean I've had more awkward conversations. Not many but some more awkward.

(laughing)

ALEX

Yeah, that'll happen. Kiko turns and starts to head below decks. Well come find me if you ever want a conversation that isn't awkward.

HELEN

Oh!

LYDIA

Cel leans over and looks directly into Azu's eyes and raises their eyebrows up and up and Cel has had a lot of time to practice this look so the exquisite step by step...yes, Bryn's doing it. They bring their goggles down from their forehead, put them on their nose, push them down slightly and yes, look over the top and eyebrows crawl upwards in ladders. Left then right then left, left, right.

HELEN

Azu looks back absolutely dumbfounded like...is it the incense...I don't...that's...

LYDIA

Yeah I think maybe you should ask her. The goggles are at the end of the nose

ALEX

And I think I'm going to end the episode there.

(laughing)

BEN

Azu is a hot commodity

HELEN

Oh yes!

ALEX

Look ok it turns out there is a mutiny and the mutiny is in everyone's pants.

(laughing)

BEN

Is there a mutiny in my pants because the captain's been thrown over...hang
on a minute...

(laughing)

ALEX

Well we’ll see where this horrendous set of decisions that I’ve made progresses next week.

HELEN

No this is the best set of decisions you’ve ever made. I love this.

LYDIA

Valid decisions.

ALEX

Well until then, bye everyone.

EVERYONE

Bye!

[Show Theme - Outro]

ALEX

Rusty Quill Gaming is a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial share alike 4.0 international license. Today's episode was directed by Alexander J Newall and produced by Hannah Preisinger. To subscribe, buy merchandise, or join our Patron, visit rustyquill.com. Rate and review us online. Tweet us @therustyquill, visit us on Facebook, or email us at mail@rustyquill.com. Join our community on Discord, or via Reddit at [r/rustyquill](https://www.reddit.com/r/rustyquill). Thanks for listening.