

RQG – 176 – Last Words (Part 1)

Content Warnings

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BEN

Hi everyone. Ben here. Just to make a quick note of clarification. A couple of episodes ago, so before the crash and everything, I made a mention of Zolf's sexuality which I wanted to stay in the episode but due to a mistake with editing and me not making it clear enough it got cut out. So, just want to basically go on the record because I've confirmed this like in replies on twitter, and the Discoid which is unfair because of the vast majority of the fan base don't, you know, interact in that way, that Zolf is by romantic grey asexual and, yeah, that's basically it. So I hope that clears some thing sup. Thanks, and enjoy the episode.

[Show Theme - Intro]

ALEX

Hello and welcome to episode 176 of the Rusty Quill Gaming podcast. I'm your host and GM Alex Newall and with me today, I have

BEN

Ben Meredith

BRYN

Bryn Monroe

Rusty Quill Gaming – 176 – Last Words (Part 1)

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

HELN

And Azu.

ALEX

And technically we're all about to be walking in the air.

ALL

Woo!

BRYN

No, we're about to be walking on a bear!

ALEX

My bad, my bad.

LYDIA/HELEN

[Singing] We're walking on the bear

[Laughter]

BEN

[Singing] The floor is quite hair-y...

(Laughter)

BEN

[Singing] It smells a little bit ... I think it is of ...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Redacted!

[Laughter]

ALEX

I really enjoy setting up like the lowest hanging fruit imaginable. And just watching everyone one else turn it into gold, is like great, fantastic.

LYDIA

Gold ...

BRYN

Yeah, that wasn't very ... yeah!

ALEX

Hey, that almost rhymed in parts.

BEN

I've turned it into iron pie right and that's as far as I'm going!

BRYN

I think that song should definitely be on the events of Rusty Quill album!

ALEX

Oh yeah! The definite eventual album!

BEN

Go talk to Tim!

BRYN

Mostly Tim. But other people guest. Helen does a jazz version of Big Boy Man.

HELEN

Oh yeah! The jazz person of everything!

ALEX

So, we are all currently now suspended from a platform being lifted just slightly above a city that wasn't there earlier. Due to the low level of fogs and mists and so on, it mostly just feels like 'oh look, a mountain appeared, and there's a city upon it!'. I am going to pick up from there, in terms of time, but with Zolf. Zolf.

BEN

I've tied myself to the wheel!

ALEX

Yep.

LYDIA

[Singing] I'm spinning around...

ALEX

That was an awkward moment where both you and Earhart try to tie yourselves to the wheel because you're both clearly in charge. At which point, Earhart just kind of backed off and gestured for you to go ahead.

BEN

I thought you were going to ... I mean if ... I'll tie myself to the captain!

[Laughter]

ALEX

That's fine Mr Smith. Bear with me.

Earhart goes into her cabin.

BRYN

No, the bear's with us!

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Grr...

ALEX

Pull out her big captain's chair, which isn't actually that big because of space concerns but it's something. Lashes that to a railing. Sits in that and then lashes her to it. Lashes herself to it.

BEN

Well, it's nice to see you've got some of your fight back at least.

ALEX

Yeah, well ... I'm currently sat on a broken vessel waiting for something.

BRYN

A bear lift!

ALEX

Something.

BEN

Yep, that's ...

ALEX

Like there's I'll be honest, I'm used to winging it. This is quite extreme, even for me.

BEN

What can I say? Anyway, Sohra said it was going to be uncomfortable, so let's prepare ourselves for whatever it is. Sure. Really hope it aint going to use its jaws!

BRYN

Is there a big 'paws' in the conversation...

LYDIA

Bryn!!!

HELEN

It's a really hairy situation.

[Laughter]

ALEX

Yes. Yes, there is. Specifically, you all wait for a while and just nothing happens. Earhart is clearly starting to get fidgety and annoyed.

BEN

You go take the lift if you want.

ALEX

Well, I can't now can I?, because it's... how do you even lift a vessel? How's that even going to work in this kind of a situation?

BEN

I don't know, I've not really acquainted myself with massive bear logistics so I assume they've got some sort of solution themselves.

LYDIA

They've got bear logistics man!

[Laughter]

ALEX

I'd like to delegate that to you Mr Smith, if that's all well and good.

BEN

Alright. Well ... consider it delegated and I'm delegatedly telling you to sit tight.

ALEX

There is another ... Bryn, help me out.

LYDA

Paws!

BRYN

Big 'paws'.

[Laughter]

BRYN

If you want us to find out Earhart's opinion at this point you call 'pawl' her.

LYDIA

What?

BRYN

'Pawl' her...

ALL

Oh!

[Laughter]

ALEX

I received your ability to interact in this conversation.

BEN

I have never heard a more ursinine pun!

[Over talking]

LYDIA

Here boy! There is some good stuff. Very good stuff.

ALEX

Mr Smith. There's something that I want to raise with you on a serious note before everything goes strange again.

BEN

Yes, captain.

ALEX

What was that?

[Laughter]

BEN

That is the ... probably ... my oldest friend has died and I really don't have the energy for big talk unless it's very relevant.

ALEX

It is very relevant Mr Smith. So thankfully I'm going to take that sigh as a [sigh] I'm sure that this is exceedingly relevant and hopefully a helpful comment.

[Laughter]

BEN

Captain, this is a fight you don't want to start. So please, get on with it.

ALEX

There is an element that is going to be at play here, which both you and I are aware of, even if the other's aren't necessarily acknowledging it. Nothing comes for free.

BEN

Sure.

ALEX

In the event that there is a price to be paid, it shall be myself who is paying that price. Do you understand me Mr Smith?

BEN

Ha! I think you'll have to fight everybody else for that privilege. So you can have that...

ALEX

Then I nominate you as my second Mr Smith because I will intend to ...

BEN

You're not dualling! You're second. What are you talking about?

ALEX

If you're going to make this a fight, it will be. I have certain responsibilities as captain of this vessel. Regardless of my ... conduct this far. Certain responsibilities transcend grudges.

BEN

Earhart ... Captain, look, let's maybe find out what the problem is, what the price is. Who wants to pay it and how it's going to be paid alright. So let's just wait for that point and then have a discussion. There's no need for grand statements using assumptions. Look, I get it. If this is you trying to pay us back for the way you've been acting or whatever, you know, proving you're a good captain that's fine. I already know you're a good captain...

ALEX

This isn't a trade. I think you might be ... you know what?, forget it Mr Smith. Let's just sit in silence. We've gotten quite good at that.

BEN

Fine, but look. They're not taking you and they're not taking this ship. Well, quite frankly we need the ship for the whole saving the world thing, so, you know ...

ALEX

I mean you say that. There's a certain appeal about rocking up to Guivres with a bear. Just a big, like a massive...

BEN

So you're intending on becoming the bear mayor?

[Laughter]

ALEX

One step at a time Mr Smith. That's not ... that's not necessarily my intent. I'm just saying that you know, there are worst allies to have.

BEN

Well I bloody hope not! Turning up to a strange place and they're saying 'I'm going to become this leader, so I can have a fight with a dragon.

ALEX

Okay now, this is just you projecting Mr Smith.

BEN

No it's blooming not! Use this thing to fight Guivres. How else you going to do that?

ALEX

Muttering.

[Laughter]

BRYN

That's also muttering!

ALEX

Ask nicely.

LYDIA

Chuckling!

ALEX

At which point, I'm not going to bother with the perception checks because you're going to hear it eventually anyway!

BEN

Yeah, I would imagine so.

ALEX

There are certain elements of like I would roll a perception check however, ya aint got a say in it for certain chunks of this. So tough! Do distinct sounds of enormous wing beats start drawing near. Multiple.

BEN

Oh bloody hell!

[Laughter]

LYDIA

The eagles are coming!

[Laughter]

ALEX

I think now might be the time that we're glad we're tied to the vessel Mr Smith.

BEN

I suppose so.

ALEX

Multiple, massive eagles sweep down out of the sky and land at various points of the vessel. And by multiple we're talking like 12ish large, like and I mean some possibly pushing huge, like in the mechanic sense.

LYDIA

Mechanically chunky!

ALEX

Mechanically chunky birds ... yeah, cover the vessel and there is a wince from Earhart as they're various talons dig into it. Technically doing even more damage in parts. Occasionally like tearing off a railing and then just shuffling along a bit and then digging in deeper to really get a hold of the deck.

I don't like this Mr Smith.

BEN

I don't think they were expecting you to like it.

ALEX

Valid point.

At which point all of them go still for a moment and they all start beating their wings simultaneously. It is the most ungainly ascent. That they have ever happened. These are not birds used to carrying enormous amounts of freight. This is not an optimal shape in ... literally the shape, it currently is, and bearing in mind as well, because they're all crowded in on one and it's an uncomfortable journey. It is all over the shop, thrown left and right, up and down, bouncing around. It's comparatively quick. But, I will bounce away from bounce being the correct word, Zolf and Earhart to join the rest of the party on the understanding that you will be making a journey that will lead you to a similar destination. Your journey is an unpleasant, inelegant, and messy

affair. I shall leave it at that. Jumping to the rest of the party, you find yourselves looking up to realise that there is a large basically crane above you. It is a timber counterweight affair. Big old blocks of stone kicking around and it is being used to slowly lead you across, from over the side, across the city. Can everyone please give me a perception check, because that will determine what I share.

[Dice roll]

HELEN

Finding me dice, it's been a long time people. It's been a very long time!

BRYN

27.

HELEN

That was a natural 1 so that's 12 overall.

BEN

Keeping up with the checks...

ALEX

Natural 1?

HELEN

Yeah.

Rusty Quill Gaming – 176 – Last Words (Part 1)

ALEX

Azu, Azu, Azu...

LYDIA

There's a bear!

ALEX

...there's a city.

[Laughter]

ALEX

Look at that!

LYDIA

Wow!

[Laughter]

ALEX

Any takers on natural 1.

BRYN

27 total.

LYDIA

I got a 19. Which is ... although that's the lowest Cel can get!

ALEX

So, to Bryn with a 27. In terms of the 19, you notice the following additional details. It's clearly built on what is effectively a horizontal palisade.

LYDIA

Mmhmm.

ALEX

So as you're bringing across, there is literally like huge tree trunks effectively are all strapped together where the ground has been a large like flattened palisade affair. You notice a couple of areas of what can best be described as ... parks where there is no palisade and at first, fur is poking through.

LYDIA

Lovely, chunky, fluff. Is that chunky fluff!!

ALEX

And in terms of people, it is ... crowded because of how dense it is. But it is not over-populated the way that many cities are. These are not streets where everyone is bustling past one another. Think more ... a village mentality even if it has a high density. City might actually be a slightly ambitious word. That's often the luck of the thing because it's so built on top of itself. This is a ... actually a smaller group of people using a limited amount of space as much as they possibly can rather than a vast population. You know, with everyone having a tiny part. It's clearly not my kind of a thing.

Hamid, from your perspective, things that leap out at you are, you know, it's all those with the addition of population. Specifically although I would say it is human dominance, it is not by much. You see a decent number of elves kicking around. They're probably the second most dominant. You also see a number of orks and halflings. Not may...

BRYN

Oh wow.

ALEX

...but you do see some. You also notice one additional factor which is quite unusual is shocks of pure white hair seem to be dotted randomly throughout the population. Halfling here, a human there. Just shocks of pure white hair.

BRYN

Ok.

LYDIA

Zolf has white hair! I've done something there. There's a ... there's a ... I ... yeah!

BEN

I think Zoya also had white hair. So I don't know if Alex is playing on that, or if I've played into Alex's hands on that one.

ALEX

All I can tell you is there are shocks of pure white hair amongst the population. There doesn't seem to be a pattern. It's not like an all women thing or like a all elderly thing. It just ... apparently at random.

BRYN

Given the side quest. Are there are manimals?

ALEX

Good question. You've geared me to my next point. The best...

BRYN

So...side quest is also Patrion only. So we should probably at this point explain what we mean by that as well.

ALEX

Why don't you elaborate on that and then I'll elaborate what you actually see.

LYDIA

You know what might be helpful for listeners. So I have not listened to the side quest. I wasn't there. And so anything that ... you won't be able to split...split??? You won't be able to slip anything past the listeners that it goes unexplained because I will ask you! So like 'Who is Zoya?' for a start and secondly, what's a manimal?

BRYN

So, the Patrion side quest Into the Wild, which you can find on our feed if you subscribe to the Rusty Quill Patrion is a three episode D&D 5E adventure set in the same world as the main campaign. Ben, Helen and I played different new characters. **Zoya, Quami and Peridot** and we were travelling into a similar-ish area to where the main campaign currently is and we encountered one of the settlements there that was on the back of a massive set.

ALEX

Spoilers!

LYDIA

What?

ALEX

Spoilers.

BEN

I mean they've already the twist for themselves in this episode. So I think we're probably quite safe!

BRYN

We also encountered ... we didn't encounter any people as such, but we were trapped by a large humanoid-ish being, that we nicknamed a manimal. They had certain ape like qualities, or could have been like a, you know, a big-foot type kind of creature of some kind.

BEN

Was it a **furbold**. Like keep thinking D&D terms. Do you think? Or like a knoll or something?

ALEX

I'm not going to answer that!

BRYN

We sought of interacted with this creature a little, but not very much. We didn't end up like, initiating conversations.

ALEX

What I would say, is Bryn, could you please give me a knowledge arcana based on your additional perception? Because the others are getting distracted. Certain a view by elemental ... not elemental, engineering aspects. So you're paying less attention to the people and...

BRYN

Also a 27.

ALEX

...to a city. Ah, ok. In terms of the 27, there is a very large proportion of humanoid-esq plant and animals. To your eye...

BRYN

Interesting.

ALEX

...this looks to be some kind of culture that is very on board with awakening as a spell which is quite a rare, but not unheard of, spell to be used in meritocratic lands. It is basically the ability to grant sentients and sapiens to things that don't normally have such things.

BEN

Just to check, we declassified the Brutor side quest didn't we? Is that on the main feed now or is that still Patrion?

BRYN

I think that's still Patrion I believe as well.

ALEX

I think that's Patrion only as well. So, there are numbers of animals that are ... again, think the sort of humanoid-esq, Disney version, you know, where you're talking hind legs and stuff.

LYDIA

Wait, wait, wait. We're talking like fox in Robin Hood kind of...

ALEX

Yes. Yes.

LYDIA

...humanoid not like, monstrous.

ALEX

Yes, correct.

LYDIA

Arrghh!

ALEX

However, there are a few what can best be described as small ants wandering around as well.

HELEN

Amazing!

LYDIA

Hot!

ALEX

They don't ... to be clear on one last point, they don't appear to be doing anything particularly different to the rest of the population. It's not like they're doing work and others aren't or anything like that. It's just ... it's just even for your eyes, quite the eclectic bunch.

BRYN

Yeah.

ALEX

As the platform is brought across in ... it is then brought down onto what can best be described as a sort of dock. It's what you would do with a dock if everything has to be got by crane. I don't know how else to put it. At which point, Zoya steps off and gestures for you all to follow. There are a few people waiting who are holding stretchers on the dock. In terms of the clothing of everyone else, it appears to be quite a lot of simple but colour fayre. So you're looking at a lot of like tunic tops and things like that. It doesn't seem to be like anyone's wearing big chains or anything like that. But in terms of colours,

we're talking like bright yellows, greens, reds, think more like ... almost like carnival colouring rather than say like drab browns or anything like that.

LYDIA

Cool. I mean I guess it's not really worth camouflaging ...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

When you've arrived on a massive bear!

ALEX

So they're ... Zoya gestures to the stretchers going...

If you prefer you may carry your fall on yourselves but we would suggest that they are placed upon these. It is a short walk to the ... to the central space.

LYDIA

Whatever you think is best. We're in ... we're very much in a way, we're in your hands and we can't thank you enough.

ALEX

Zoya takes a moment. Looks around at you all. Steps across. Has a quite conversation with the stretcher bearers who then head off.

I believe that though tired, your party seems like you would benefit from carrying your own. Please correct me if I am wrong.

LYDIA

Yes, yes. We would like to do that honour. Although if you would prefer to carry them if that would be more practical because I don't ... we may be quite unsteady on your moving ground.

ALEX

She gestures towards the stretchers for you all. Unless anyone has something specific to do, I am just going to make you sort of NPCs as ... NPCs make this happen. I'm ok with that as a thing unless anyone really has something specific they want to push.

HELEN

I would like for Azu to help carry Carter.

ALEX

Ok. That's fine.

LYDIA

I think Azu is the only person of equal height ... no, no, Cel could probably share on with Barnes. I was just thinking it would be quite unintentionally comical if you have like kobolds very seriously carrying...like picking up at one end.

BRYN

Yes, you probably need to match.

LYDIA

And then you...

BRYN

You need to match sizes.

LYDIA

Cel at the end is like ...

ALEX

You're going to match to egret.

LYDIA

Slide down...

ALEX

We'll just go ahead and say that's fine and start moving through the city proper. As you are moving through, everyone basically people are going about their business, but once they see a procession moving through, they all basically step aside and a natural avenue is afforded to you from the dock straight through. People just stand ... they don't seem to be like doing the funeral thing, I don't know how else to put it of like you know, either like the bowed heads or anything like that. It's just that everyone stands very, very still and clears a space for you to walk through. And then as you have passed through, people continue as if nothing has really, really happened.

BRYN

So more like just being polite and considerate and reverent.

ALEX

Yeah, that's a good way of putting it. I would say that you're probably drawing a few stairs from like children, who are occasionally running through like the streets, comparatively unsupervised. But it's not ... you're not more than like a kind of idle curiosity. The reason I'm saying this is I can't be clear enough. You are not the talk of the town.

BRYN

Yeah.

[Laughter]

ALEX

I'm going to jump to Zolf temporarily as everyone is walking through. Zolf, after what feels like an hour but was probably only like a few minutes, may be 10 minutes or something. You are clopped unceremoniously on a similar dock with Earhart who immediately begins unbinding herself.

BEN

[Sighs]. Thanks for the lift.

ALEX

Oh yes, thank you birds.

BEN

I think they're ... they're people.

ALEX

Thank you bird people. What are we doing here? I don't know what's happened.

BEN

Well, we've crashed our ship and now there's a giant bear with a city on the back of it and we're there now.

ALEX

But when you say it all like that, it sounds completely ridic...

Could someone take us to our people please? Thank you. Please.

BEN

I'm going to untie myself and have a look around. This place isn't massive so I'll probably just see at least Azu.

[Laughter]

BEN

Who continues to be large and pink!

ALEX

So you can see the tail end of the procession, in inverted commas, heading deeper into the town. From where you are here, the birds have basically ... I say birds, the eagles have effectively dispersed apart from one who does the whole swooped down transformation at the edge of the ship and gestures for you to follow them.

BEN

Yep. Thanks very much. Thanks for the save. Thank you, specifically to you know, getting our ship up here.

ALEX

This is not a concern. I would say you might have more trouble repairing your vessel than us fetching it.

BEN

Yeah, yeah. Probably. But that is a later problem, so, you know. We've picked up all the bits.

[Laughter]

ALEX

May I re-join you with your group?

BEN

Yeah, please.

ALEX

At which point, you, Earhart and your escort lets call them. Your ... what's the word?

BEN

Guide?

ALEX

Thank you. I literally blanked on the word guide. I was like cohort ... captain ... admiral. Your admiral leads you ... right! Your guide leads you through a sort of route that is converging on the others, though I would point out that you're not afforded the same courtesy that they were. In terms of people are just going about their business and you are expected to move through. Because of that, it's far more obvious to you and Earhart, the whole like 'oh look, I'm pimped'. Like just because you can't push past people, it doesn't work like that. It...there's too many different sizes kicking around.

BEN

I remain myopic.

ALEX

Yep, that's fine. You manage to quite easily catch up with the rest of the group. It seems that Sohra is setting a comparatively slow pace and you manage to catch up to the tail end and so we are all re-joined. As a group, you then proceed through to what feels like the centre of the town. As you make it towards the centre, you see something that's kind of reminiscent of if anyone has even seen the Globe Theatre.

LYDIA

Ooh, yay!

ALEX

A large round structure, primarily of timber with some like ... think of it as like plaster. I don't know how else to put it, like making up some of the walls and so on, but it is a large circular thatched building that appears to have an open centre and it is in the exact centre of what could best be described as a town square I guess to a degree. It is not a large building. It's just that everywhere

else, everything is around the 2-3 storey mark building on top of one another and there is a space where there is just a building. Just one. With nothing crowding in on it. It has a respectful distance around it on all sides. Sohra leads you through to the main entrance. She stops before a pair of large double doors and turns to you.

At this point, I must ask, as part of this ritual it is required that a carer ... a guide is provided for each of your fallen. Beyond this point I would normally only allow your guides. I would like to offer you all a moment to decide who your guides will be. There is no version of this where we are able to guide them ourselves. It must be someone ... at least familiar.

BRYN

I've got Wilde.

HELEN

Do you need to be magical or what?

ALEX

No.

HELEN

To someone they knew?

ALEX

You need to be someone they would listen ... at least listen to.

LYDIA

Cel turns to Skraak and kneels down so that ...

Would you ... would you allow me to guide one of the kobolds. Maybe either Sasha ... this is so much my fault and I know that I can do this. I know that you might want to be the one that goes, but I think they would recognise me. It would ... it would mean a lot to me to be able to held with this.

ALEX

Skraak goes very quiet and still for a little bit. And then gives you a real, deep look. This is someone actually really, like looking. Taking a read on you and just trying to get a sense of where you're going with this.

LYDIA

But if you want to go, I absolutely will defer.

ALEX

I understand why you would need this. Sassraa would list to you.

LYDIA

Yeah.

ALEX

But, if you are going to do this, please remember this is for Sassraa and not for you or your guilt.

LYDIA

Oh, I know that.

ALEX

Skraak then just reaches out, gives a sort of pat on your hand and then steps aside effectively. Earhart does pipe up going...

Is it possible for one person to guide all of them?

Sohra's just this is not how this works. This is less based on authority than ... it is more complex than this. It is more complex than responsibility.

BRYN

And it should be one person for each person.

ALEX

This is correct.

HELEN

Barnes?

ALEX

Yeah?

HELEN

Do you want to go and get Carter?

ALEX

Can I have word Azu?

HELEN

Yeah.

ALEX

Just a quick one.

HELEN

Yes.

ALEX

Barnes sets aside for a second. He seems quite business-like as opposed to like emotionally drawn in or anything.

HELEN

Intriguing.

ALEX

I would normally. But ... it occurs to me that we're dealing with life and death and ... I can't help thinking that it might be a better benefit for someone with a bit more familiarity in this area to step in. I don't like to ask but ...

HELEN

Oh!

ALEX

I worry that I'm not ... fit for this.

HELEN

Oh! James, if you're ... I abso... of course, I will if you ... if you want me to but this is ... you know. I've not done it before.

ALEX

Carter needs the best shot he has. The closest thing to spiritual I got was one time I got really drunk and look at the stars. It's not really a thing I've engaged with, you know.

HELEN

I see. Well, alright. He definitely knows who I am, at least. Alright.

She puts out her hand to like shake.

ALEX

He takes it and give her a proper shake as well.

HELEN

Yeah, I'm honoured that you would trust me with your friend.

ALEX

Yeah, sure.

BRYN

Sohra, are there risks to the guide? How is ... is there danger in this?

ALEX

There are not risks to your guides. There are ... what you face is a conversation, not a journey. To consider it a dangerous journey would be a misunderstanding. Your goal is not here to conquer someone. It is to converse with them.

BRYN

Thank you. Well, I mean Skraak if it was a risk I was going to offer to undertake it because I don't think that risking you would be appropriate at this juncture but if there's no risk to the guide, then I feel like you would be best placed to ... to guide Meerk back, Skraak.

ALEX

Skraak takes a moment and goes...

Right. I think I should guide Meerk. That seems right. Ok, so there are four of us then.

BRYN

Yep.

We'll be waiting here for you when you get back.

ALEX

Earhart's uncharacteristically quiet.

[Laughter]

LYDIA

No fighting for you!

ALEX

Yeah, I will say this actually. Without a sense motive, there was a distinct change in Earhart's mode, which is 'no, I'll punch ghosts on behalf of my team' to there is literally no risks involved for anyone here.

Ok, this is less about punching ghosts than I hoped. I'm kind of ready to punch some ghosts and there are no ghosts to punch.

So Earhart is kind of taking a bit of a back seat.

Sohra, if you're all ready then we will have people bring your fallen in and we can begin.

BRYN

The rest of us should wait out here?

ALEX

Yes, I think that would best.

BRYN

That's fine.

ALEX

This may take a few hours.

BEN

Find a pub! Have a drink!

ALEX

Do that before ... of a kind! I would say, before we do proceed, there is no guarantee that this will work for all. You must all understand this before we enter.

BEN

Yeah, we're asking them back, not forcing them. I get that.

ALEX

This is the way. Yes. Correct. Very well.

HELEN

Alright.

ALEX

Sohra sort of pushes the door open and then a few people inside come out. These are wearing grey. Basically ... not robes, but sort of on the way to robes. They're not big, bellowing over the top affairs, but they're quite shapeless grey affair. And they all they think more like monk. Like a habit if you know what I mean? Is that what it's called for monks?

BRYN

Cassock for monks.

HELEN

Yes, a habit is for nuns!

ALEX

Yeah, I mixed them up. Sorry. Yeah, it's a lot more like a cassock. That's the best way to describe it. A grey cassock.

BEN

Actually, that's one question. What are the ancestry of these individuals? Is it like you know you've got sort of the bird people as the kind of like the native arsinies and then the other like ancestries have been invited in, or is it like fully mixed or like what's the ... what dynamic are we getting from this?

ALEX

To your eye so far, fully mixed.

BEN

Sure. So the Priests, for lack of a better word, more like the attendance here are ...

ALEX

Yeah, there are ... there would be ... so there's four of you, so there would be eight attendants. Of those, I would say five are human, probably an ork and then ... you know what, why not?, I'd say two ... yeah, two halflings I'd say.

BEN

Sure. Cool. Yeah, I was just getting social dynamics. Obviously Sohra is ... a person who can turn into a bird, I don't know.

BRYN

Well I assume some sort of high level druid person I think.

ALEX

This sounds like a bunch of conversations we can have at some point.

Sohra pushes the door open and these attendants come out, take up the stretchers and then gently head inside. Sohra gestures to our four guides to step in as well.

HELEN

Yeah, Azu waves goodbye to Hamid and Kiko and the others.

BRYN

Hamid is going to try and run up and hug each of you, who is willing quickly before you go in.

HELEN

Ah, yep sure.

Azu's like don't worry, we'll be back.

BRYN

I know, just good luck.

And I will give Cel a big hug as well.

LYDIA

Cel gives you a big hug back.

BRYN

I offer a hug to Skraak?

ALEX

The best you're going to get from Skraak is a predator like ...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Arm wrestle time!

ALEX

You can take it or leave it but that's what's on the cards.

BRYN

Hamid does a very poor attempt to imitating Skraak's...

[Laughter]

BRYN

...gesture.

[Laughter]

BRYN

He's trying but he doesn't have the hang of it yet!

ALEX

There's not much bicep showing at Skraak's end, but that's ok. The gesture is still there.

BRYN

And will Zolf accept a hug?

BEN

You get a shoulder pat. A not unkind shoulder pat, but you know, not a hug.

[Laughter]

ALEX

And on that we'll close the doors to the ritual space and we'll come back in a couple of minutes I think.

LYDIA

Hi everyone. Lydia here. You may know me as Melanie in Magnus Archives or from Rusty Quill gaming. I'm here to tell you about this episode's sponsor, the Stormlight Archive, volume 4, Rhythm of War by internationally best-selling author, detailed world builder and writer of some of the most fine tuned

systems of magic you will ever read, Brandon Sanderson. This series is perfect for fans of tabletop RPGs. You'll love the aforementioned magic system and encounter some of the coolest places you'll ever read about. Ratchetting up the tensions big and small that Sanderson began in the Stormlight Archives book 1, *The Way of Kings*, now is the perfect time to pick a side, join the fight and dive into this New York Times best selling series. By Brandon Sanderson's *Rhythm of War*, the latest in the New York Times best-selling Stormlight saga. Just search for *Rhythm of War* wherever books are sold, or visit the link in this episode's description for more information.

ALEX

And welcome back. I'm going to stick with Hamid for now. Hamid you are left outside with the rest of the party. In terms of the space that surrounds this ritual hall, the best way I could describe it is think almost like a paved area although it is timbered, it is not paved with stone. And there are small portions of like, literally trees, non-awakened trees dotted around the space and benches and urns that appear to be water sources because you're not going to have plumbing running through a bear, that would be bad and effectively it just seems to be a bit of a quiet contemplation space where there are a few people sat around but there's not much happening. In terms of the, for the sake of ease, NPCs, they all seem to be milling around settling themselves around this place and maybe having the odd quiet conversation, but not much. What are you intending?

BRYN

What are the kobolds doing?

ALEX

They are all ... not keeping to themselves but they are in a slightly more ... I'd say reverent mood than some of the others.

BRYN

Yeah, so I noticed when the bodies were there before, they, you know, all of them apart from Skraak were sort of sitting in silence and reverence next to the bodies...

ALEX

They seem to be doing similar without...

BRYN

Yeah.

ALEX

...the bodies there.

BRYN

Yeah. Basically, I'm going to approach Natun specifically. And ...

Natun, may I join you.

ALEX

Natun looks up. Looks down. They all scootch up just a little bit and pats the ground beside themselves.

BRYN

Yeah, I'm going to sit ... I'm going to adopt the same pose and sit in silence with them.

ALEX

The best way to describe it, is it seems broadly meditative. It is ... there's not really much movement or anything. It's not forced either in so far as it's not like that. Occasionally someone might shuffle, or itch or something. But it's just very much like a quiet, almost heads into the circle, just sitting and being quiet.

BRYN

Yeah. I will try and catch ... Barnes' eye and just give him a nod and be like you know, this is where I'll be but I'll see you in a bit.

ALEX

Barnes gives a nod and you get the impression that Barnes has taken it upon himself to sort of keep an eye on everyone. However, Earhart's very much doing the same thing so they keep catching each other's eyes.

[Laughter]

ALEX

In which case then, I'm going to jump to the party who are heading into the ritual hall.

So heading inside, it is not spooky I'm afraid. There is very little in the way of darkness here because it has an open space in the middle. There is a surrounding corridor which appears to have sort of storage for let's call in paraphernalia. You know what I'm talking there, you're talking like torches, a couple of like crates over there that probably have something. There's definitely some incense in the corner, that kind of thing. But, as you head through, you through into what at first appears to be a large sanded circular space. There are no markings there. It is just a large sanded space. It has a slight mound to it, not much, just a little bit. And the stretcher bearers sort of step through and lay them out in basically the compass points of the circle. Worth bearing in mind, this has an open top so this is not an interior space.

There is light ... sunlight sort of streaming into this space. And the stretcher bearers lay them down then step backwards, keep stepping backwards and then eventually take up positions. Backs to what is effectively the circling wall, facing inwards with their heads bowed. Sohra steps forward and sort of gestures for all of the guides to gather around for a second.

If you're all ready, it is worth understanding that this varies on who is involved. We can tell you how to begin. And we can tell you how it will end. But the steps between can vary. Do you all understand this? If you ask us to guide you, we cannot. You are the guides. We only provide the opportunity.

BRYN

Right.

ALEX

Very well. If you all please take a position towards the head of your subject, sit, be quiet, be calm, be well. Matters will take their own course. Do not be concerned by the actions of your supporters. They gesture to the people encircling them. They are here only to assist. Not to interfere.

HELEN

Alright.

LYDIA

Sure.

BRYN

Yeah, right. Cool.

ALEX

Oh, and before you go. Nothing here can harm you.

BEN

That makes a change.

HELEN

Ok.

ALEX

This does not mean it may not hurt!

HELEN

Ha! Well...oh, you mean like ... you mean like hurt in your heart.

ALEX

Yes.

HELEN

Ok. Alright.

LYDIA

Oh right, like an emotional pain?

HELEN

Yeah.

ALEX

Be ready for someone not to want to return. It is not unusual.

HELEN

Yeah. Alright.

ALEX

Sohra steps back and gestures for you all to take your positions.

HELEN

Ok.

ALEX

Your supporters then sort of step away from the circle, leaving you sort of in your positions...

LYDIA

They start their cheer leading routine.

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Give me a “B”, give me a “L”, give me “I” “V” “E”.

[Laughter]

LYDIA

What does that spell?

[Laughter]

ALEX

Cel, give me a perception check.

LYDIA

Ok.

BEN

Is that the YMCA?

LYDIA

Oh my gosh, over to you. Please let me be using these up now and good rolls later, so that's 16.

ALEX

That's fine. To everyone, a slightly acrid smell starts to move through the space. Cel, you can't place it. I was giving you the chance to maybe, but no, afraid not. If any of you choose to look it's like no one's saying don't or anything, you'll see that urns appear to be placed near you which are basically emitting quite a pungent smell. It's unusual. It's a combination of quite floral and quite acrid. It's almost like flowers that have been left to rot slightly and then had some vinegar. Something like that. And they are placed near you

and then for a brief period, the supporters effectively pull out ... large fans. Fan the fumes around the space a little bit and then close them back up and just stand waiting. And then you're waiting. And then can everyone please give me a will save.

BEN

30.

ALEX

30.

LYDIA

I rolled a 10. Well, no, I mean it's 10 total.

HELEN

I'm rolling rubbish today! That's 22.

ALEX

So, interestingly given the will saves, Zolf is apparently the first to succumb in inverted commas, because will save is not just about resisting stuff, it's also about getting yourself in the right head space. Zolf, after a while you are aware that at first, you have the ambient sounds of the surrounding city. You seem to sort of drop away a little bit. Then eventually the surrounding sounds within the building itself drop away. At that point it's just the breathing of the rest of the party and that drops away. Honestly, the first thing that jumps into your mind is it's very reminiscent of moving through the Borealis actually. It doesn't have the tones but in terms of the way it seems to function, it's very similar. It is that slow shrinking of horizons. And just with the Borealis assuming that you don't sort of open your eyes and start trying to wander around or something...

BEN

Nope.

ALEX

It starts to expand back outwards again. The sand beneath your feet starts to feel a little bit more coarse than it was when you first knelt down. The buildings around you seems a lot more open and the city itself seems to be very quiet. And by very quiet I mean it still sounds like the city which seems to be characterised by quite a lot of creaking rope, shifting timbers, that kind of thing. But there appears to be no people.

BEN

I will ... once the sort of transition as it were, has ceased, I will wait another couple of beats and then open my eyes.

ALEX

You seem to be where you were before. No one else appears to be there. But there appears to be a set of footsteps in the sand from where Wilde was lay leading out of the building.

BEN

Follow them. Sure.

ALEX

Makes sense. So following them through to the edge of the building, you push open the doors and ... sorry, I shouldn't say you push open the doors, but I'm assuming that you would given where it's leading.

BEN

Yeah, I continue to follow.

ALEX

Sure. So, pushing open the doors you can see ... you do appear to be in the city. There does not appear to be anyone there at all. We're not talking apocalyptic, it's not like there's you know over turned buses and all that. It's just empty. It's clean. It's empty. And there's no one there.

BEN

We're in the spectral realm is my guess.

ALEX

Give me a perception check.

[Dice roll]

BEN

20.

ALEX

20, ok. You cannot place it but you have the distinct impression that Wilde has passed through here. You can't see any footsteps or something. And it's very hard to explain. But you have a clear sense of direction that you could track to. Regardless of the fact that there are no footsteps. You do not have any point of reference for this feeling, but there is a feeling there.

BEN

I will close my eyes and walk either until it seems fine or I hit a wall!

[Laughter]

ALEX

You don't it seems to make life a lot easier.

BEN

Yep.

ALEX

You walk an unnecessarily long distance. Because like everyone's played this game before. It's like how far can I go and I just sort of yeah ... you pass enough of a distance to go ok, there's no way I would've done this unless somethings are like at play here. So yeah, I'm going to leave you doing that for now and jump across to [singing] who is second in the list?, it was Azu.

HELEN

Yeah?

ALEX

So Azu is with Carter, correct?

HELEN

Yep.

ALEX

Good. A similar sensation to what happened with Zolf happens. The sounds of the city recede. The sounds of the building recede. The sounds of the people around Azu recede. Then, the sounds of the building return. They seem much larger, a bit more echoey, more stone like. It feels like a much larger space. Much colder and you have the sense of stillness that was not there before. Where before obviously there was the open top, now it feels still. Not quite claustrophobic but certainly an interior space whereas before it was not. And there is a distance susurration of people. People ... a lot of people are being very quiet.

HELEN

Azu is going to open her eyes then.

ALEX

I have to ask a question of Helen. Has Azu ever been inside a museum?

HELEN

No. She was on her farm and then she was at Seminary and then she was in Cairo and then she was ...

ALEX

Boo, doing this nonsense!

HELEN

Yeah!

[Laughter]

ALEX

In which case then I can cater description to that, that's fine.

HELEN

Ok.

ALEX

Azu finds herself in something that feels vaguely reminiscent of Seminary. A large stoned space with items, presumably holy items or something similar, dotted around the walls. They appear to be items of like great age, sort of like a fractured stone column. A broken sword, that kind of thing. And they seem to be surrounding a large stone circular space. It very much feels very reminiscent of Seminary. Especially that ... the murmur of voices who have learned to be quiet in this space. However, you are alone in the space apparently.

HELEN

Azu says...

Carter ... Howard?

ALEX

You hear from a distant room... shush!

HELEN

Azu heads towards whoever did the shush!

ALEX

Yeah, makes sense!

[Laughter]

ALEX

At which point then Cel, you were with Sassraa.

LYDIA

Sassraa.

ALEX

Cool. So for yourself, similar situation. The surrounding sounds fade away. The building fades away. The people surrounding you fade away. And then seemingly nothing happens for quite a long period at which point you realise that you can hear the sound of faint fires. Controlled fires. Not like an inferno or anything like that. And it seems to be, to your ear, coming from somewhere along a cave or a tunnel or something like that.

LYDIA

Sassraa. Buddy. Sassraa.

ALEX

Do you open your eyes or not?

LYDIA

Yes.

ALEX

Ok. You find yourself in a comparatively large tunnel.

LYDIA

Phew! Because Cel is much taller than a kobold.

ALEX

Yes, it feels unusually large to you. You're used to a slightly cramped quality in a medium sized space. This feels more like it is built for large creatures. There is some kind of woven mat rug on the floor and there is the distinct colour and sound of firelight from a distant bend in the tunnel ahead.

LYDIA

Cel walks towards that.

ALEX

And that feels like a natural stopping point for this episode.

LYDIA

Woo!

HELEN

At peace for...

ALEX

Yeah, it's odd. It's going to be really difficult to sneak in explosions and not feel like I'm cheating now!

[Laughter]

BEN

I'm sure you'll find a way.

LYDIA

Explosions are one of the things that Sassraa and Cel bonded over, so it was really quite organic!

[Laughter]

ALEX

Yeah, you hear a distant boom ... [sighs]...

[Laughter]

ALEX

Well, we return to this and find out what shenanigans I have planned for you next week, but until then, bye everyone.

EVERYONE

Bye!

[Show Theme - Outro]

ALEX

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