

## **RQG – 181 – Baggage**

### **Content Warnings**

- X
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**[Show Theme - Intro]**

**ALEX**

Hello and welcome to episode 181 of the Rusty Quill Gaming podcast. I'm your host and GM Alex Newall and with me today, I have

**BEN**

Ben Meredith

**BRYN**

Bryn Monroe

**LYDIA**

Lydia Nicholas

**HELEN**

And Helen Gould

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**ALEX**

And who are you playing?

**BEN**

Zolf Smith

**BRYN**

Hamid Saleh Haroun al-Tahan

**LYDIA**

Cel Sidebottom

**HELEN**

And Azu

**ALEX**

And I've brought you all to a lovely garden with no consequences.

**HELEN**

I highly doubt that!

**LYDIA**

It's pretty!

**ALEX**

Nice, pretty place where we can all retire.

**HELEN**

No. Absolutely not.

**BRYN**

Lies. You're the king of lies.

**ALEX**

So as a very, very broad, brief summary we are overlooking the Garden of Yerlik, a large luridly coloured, let's call it, half forest half orchard. All kind of Japanese martial art cherry blossom sequence with it spraying blue up the side of the mountain as the blossoms have blown into the side. It looks inappropriate for the mountain cauldron within which it resides. We are picking up with you all stood with the druids who have now returned to their humanoid shapes on, we shall call it, a currently exposed bluff overlooking all of this however this is not a, you're about to get blown off. You could just back away from it and you could just have a conversation, it's fine. I just wanted a nice view to start it with. You are currently in the extreme north. So you all have actual viscera in front of you. And I'm going to do something real, real weird here that's going to really throw all of you and I just thought...I'm going to have an entire few sessions of curveballs alright. You can have a perception check right and you know what there's not gonna be?

**LYDIA**

What?

**ALEX**

Mist in your way.

**LYDIA**

Woah!

**ALEX**

Borealis in your way.

**LYDIA**

What?

**ALEX**

There's still enough light to just about see by.

**LYDIA**

Nice

**ALEX**

And I'm actually gonna tell you things instead of go, nobody knows.

**LYDIA**

Ooh. And there's no tears in her eyes as far as I'm aware.

**HELEN**

Oh how exciting.

**ALEX**

No. None of you are under any persistent illusion affects that I'm aware of.  
You can have your first legit perception check in about ten episodes.

**BRYN**

24 total.

**ALEX**

Ok good.

**LYDIA**

33

**ALEX**

Ok.

**BEN**

16

**HELEN**

17

**ALEX**

Ok, ok. So I got three tiers. Nice, excellent.

**LYDIA**

Did you even write something with a DC that high? This is a whole...

**ALEX**

Yes.

**LYDIA**

Cel rolled a 19 and their bonus is 14.

**ALEX**

Yeah I'll reward that. That's fair. So at the very, very lowest tier here. It appears to be natural in its layout. It doesn't appear to be like regimented rows or anything like that. It really does appear to be naturally occurring. There are clumps. There are broader areas, things like that. The trees themselves appear to be wildly differing in age so there are some older ones which are big and by big I mean, excessively large and there are clearly younger ones which are clearly approaching more, like a sapling here is what a full grown tree normally would be in terms of size but they are clearly...there are multiple ages here. It doesn't appear to start young at one end and then go older at the other. It appears to be just a sort of large, interrelated mass.

Ok. In terms of, I mentioned that there was a sort of soured area towards the middle where the colouring had sort of died off and so on. For lowest tier, yeah it's clear that there appears to be, the best way I can describe it is have you ever seen an aerial, this is a bit specific, but have you ever seen an aerial shot of like a wood that has a blight or something in it. In a normal set of trees it would be like an area where it's either got no leaves where it should have for that season or it can be one where the colouring's just wrong where you have all of these red trees and then yellow in the middle in like a patch because there's a blight. Here there is no colour there. There still appear to be having petals and so on but they're greys there, they're browns. They are colourless. They don't appear to be necessarily dead as such but even from this distance you can see there is a clear, sort of, spreading sickness of some kind from what appears to be, broadly speaking, the centre. Although it does seem to get denser towards the centre, it doesn't appear to have a key tree as well. That's worth bearing in mind. There's not some big earth tree from which all of the others have sprung just to be absolutely clear. It is more like a forest. At that stage, jumping up one additional tier, there's movement between the trees. It's quite difficult to discern because of the petals that are sort of moving across and so on and for a while it's like it could just be...no, there's definitely things moving around in there. They don't appear to be enormous to be clear.

**BRYN**

Good, good.

**ALEX**

From this distance they appear to be kind of your-ish size. There might be a couple of larger things moving around.

**BRYN**

Well normal wild creature size.

**ALEX**

You're talking between medium and large. Nothing bigger. Like anything bigger, you know there is nothing bigger in there.

**BRYN**

Sure

**ALEX**

You would just see it. The vantage is too good. The visibility is too good. You know there's nothing that big. However large is still a decent size.

**BRYN**

A bear

**ALEX**

That can still be up to the size of...yeah a bear. A large bear something like that. In terms of the other things to bear in mind is there definitely appears to be more movement towards the edge of that dead area with less movement heading out towards the edges and for our highest tier.

**LYDIA**

Hello, Cel can see through time. All the being that has ever existed in this moment.

**ALEX**

Funny you should say that.

**LYDIA**

Oh dear

**ALEX**

There are things that you can see which are a bit odd. One is you are certain that you can see a couple of the trees are actively moving around.

**LYDIA**

Ah this ain't fun.

**ALEX**

You're like – I'm pretty certain that's not just a wind...yeah that tree is actively moving through this area. You see movement of both coloured and the non coloured trees. So like bright blue ones moving and also the sort of greyer, browner one definitely appears to be movement. The distance is so far it's quite difficult to discern how they're moving but they definitely are. And you also have one additional which is you think that you are getting half glimpses of potentially spectral creatures in origin, something like that. You're a fairly

well travelled person. We're talking things beyond mundane, there's a plant that's moving.

**LYDIA**

Yeah that's so mundane.

**ALEX**

That isn't just someone hiding. It has more like a mirage quality at points where it's like, you see a person, then the person is gone and you know they haven't moved so there's definitely magical affect at play.

**LYDIA**

Do you mean that the things that everyone else is thinking are basically big squirrels, Cel is aware are spectres or is there another thing Cel sees.

**ALEX**

There is another thing on top.

**LYDIA**

Ok I am going to be calling them big squirrels.

**ALEX**

But to be clear it's because you have gone – I think there's something strange going on here and you've been focusing in on things that most people would dismiss as a shift here...

**LYDIA**

Cel puts the goggles on.

**ALEX**

Yeah that's the kind of thing we're talking about. Like you're really, really getting...I'm rewarding an exceedingly high...an exceedingly high DC there. Sorry for the over description, it's just there's a lot at play here and I wanted to give you all a fair whack.

**LYDIA**

That is about as high as a creature could roll at ninth level.

**ALEX**

Yeah like there's not really much higher you can get so I'll give you that. In terms then of the two druids who are there beside you. They've been staying quiet however they haven't been...I don't know how to put it, you know the sort of reverent silence where you sit and you bow your head and you're making a big song and dance of I'm being quiet. Not that. They've mostly just basically gestured for you to have a look and have just let you soak it in and let you have a think. For the sake of our own RP they aren't going to be starting this conversation until you've had a good look and want to like to start. Just to like make life easier.

**LYDIA**

Cel will turn over and be like – so are these trees? Are these people? I mean I can see they're walking around. There's quite a lot going on down there. Can

we talk to them? Is this another culture or community? Are they your friends? Or...sorry if I'm being disrespectful, are they your gods or is there maybe more of a complex thing? They seem quite...this is a very interesting place. Cel will probably not stop babbling until someone...

**ALEX**

Sumutnyerl looks concerned at Sohra for a little while and then Sohra holds up her hand and goes – which question would you like answered first?

**LYDIA**

I mean it's all really one question which is kind of wha? This place, what does it mean to you?

**ALEX**

Sohra takes a moment, considers, tuns to Sumutnyerl and then just says – were

**LYDIA**

I understand you, I do. So more specifically, what does this place mean to you?

**ALEX**

The Garden of Yerlik is the final resting place for our people. It is a garden that makes thin the veil between where we are and where we will be.

**LYDIA**

Ok.

**ALEX**

It is both sustained by and serves the spirits of the people who are laid here. It serves us both a resting place and place for contemplation. I believe the word oracle may be relevant.

**LYDIA**

Yes! Is there an oracle here? Do they tell the future? I suppose not the past, that's less useful although honestly sometimes clarification of historical stuff is really useful. I mean I've known some people that are fighting...

**ALEX**

The garden is...

**LYDIA**

Oh yes sorry.

**ALEX**

...the oracle.

**LYDIA**

I see.

**BRYN**

You brought us here to show us something.

**ALEX**

You see the blight?

**BRYN**

Yes

**ALEX**

This began very small at first, roughly three years ago. It was a small sickness but then approximately two years ago it changed. It worsened.

**BEN**

Have you got any idea what's happening?

**ALEX**

No. This has never happened before but you speak of these blue veins. Yes?

**BEN**

Yeah

**ALEX**

These are considered a Yerlik mark. It is a sign that the person laid to rest has been accepted by the garden. It should not affect a living creature in this way. It does not function like this.

**BEN**

When you say that...when you say they've been accepted by the garden, does that mean they're still animate or it's just the corpses will get blue veins if they're accepted, as you say.

**ALEX**

The remains will show the signs of the roots and then their spirit will be free to wander the garden and converse with those who remain.

**BEN**

Right.

**LYDIA**

What happens to the ones who are not accepted?

**ALEX**

This is very unusual, very rare. Normally they are cremated. It is not a sign of necessarily evil. Certain free spirits, independent peoples may not be accepted though we do not know necessarily whether it is by their choice or by their nature.

**BEN**

Is anyone else apart from you and your community aware of the existence of this garden?

**ALEX**

Sohra starts to answer – no, well of course as we said this is a hallow ground. Sumutnyerl says – there has been one. This is news to Sohra. Sohra’s like – excuse me?

**BEN**

Their name?

**ALEX**

Excuse me what?!

**HELEN**

Yes, their name or what they look like maybe?

**ALEX**

A man. He went by the name “Nik”

**BEN**

Ola Tesla.

**ALEX**

He stayed with us for approximately a year. He spent his time with us and was granted a visit to the garden.

**BEN**

Out of character. Do we know what Nikola Tesla looked like?

**ALEX**

Yeah to be clear, after the lightning rails went he was...

**BRYN**

He was a famous person in London at least.

**ALEX**

...the UK. He went from famous inventor to famous charlatan who ruined the country kind of thing.

**BEN**

Then I will give a physical description of Nikola Tesla.

**ALEX**

Yes. That...this is the one who called themselves Nik, yes.

**BEN**

Great. Good call. Right so Eddison stole that research.

**BRYN**

Well the notebook that I showed you. The seed was kept inside. We believe that belonged to this man. He must've taken the seed when he was here.

**ALEX**

Sohra, by the way, looks visibly shaken by the news that someone was granted access to this place. Sumutnyerl looks actively very...not necessarily ashamed but incredibly awkward. It has happened previously. Nik rendered a number of services and showed himself to be nothing but respectful and measured...

**BEN**

Not asking you to defend your choices. What's happened, happened and it might be that Nikola Tesla did respect your things but then another individual, probably Thomas Eddison, nicked his research.

**ALEX**

Sumutnyerl looks you dead in the eye and says – there has not been another here since that was not of our own.

**BEN**

Yeah but obviously Nikola took a seed...

**ALEX**

And that is an incredible betrayal.

**BEN**

Right

**HELEN**

Oh dear.

**ALEX**

To take a seed from the garden would be tantamount to...

**HELEN**

Desecration.

**ALEX**

Beyond desecration. This would be...you are taking the fruit of ancestors beyond count. You are...it is a violation I struggle to explain.

**HELEN**

I'm so sorry.

**BEN**

Then let's try and undo his, yeah, betrayal. Right.

**ALEX**

Sohra very quietly goes – you should've told us of this Sumutnyerl. This is my failing. They're very tense now. Much tension. Much unspoken tension between two NPCs that Alex will not be having a conversation between because it would take ages and it would be boring.

**LYDIA**

Listeners, Alex is beautifully miming two silent characters just shooting each other looks that just carry such depth of meaning. There's obviously a very long history between them which...

**ALEX**

Honestly just speaking would just be a disservice.

**LYDIA**

I think so Alex. I mean your acting has us all shaken to our core.

**BRYN**

Obviously our goal here is to understand what's going on back in our homes but this is your place. Is it possible...is it permitted for us to attempt to help you understand what has happened if we can do that. If we can find a way to help you understand the blight or even take steps on the road to repairing it. Is that something we could assist you with?

**ALEX**

You have been brought here because you asked if there was a way to assist. The rules of our people are such that only those of us who may enter are the people to be laid to rest

**HELEN**

Alright.

**ALEX**

Myself, those who I grant entrance as my representatives. I have no remedy to this situation. The closer one approaches the blight, the greater the desecration, the confusion. You need to understand the garden does not show you what you wish, the garden will show you what it wants you to know. It grows confused and dangerous the closer to the desecration and to reveal the scope of this problem to our people would be an insurmountable problem.

**BEN**

Well that's also sort of...that's your trial to deal with so we're not gonna...anyway but like – and I'll turn to the rest of the group – what do you think we can learn here? Like this is big obviously. We know maybe this is corrupted with necromantic magic or whatever but us walking in there, what are we gonna get out of that?

**LYDIA**

It's impossible to say without going there. It may be trying to show visions of what's going wrong in the same way that Shoin in the orb was able to show us snatches of what was happening in ways that we could understand. Like if you were a member of Sohra and Sumutnyerl's community and you saw the things that Shoin had drawn or even if I had seen them without your explanation of what had happened in London, it wouldn't have made any sense but you having seen the whole story can understand what those visions meant. And maybe put things together.

**BRYN**

If there are residents in the garden we can communicate with we can at least ask them if they have anything to tell us or share with us. If there's some connection between people here and people out there, maybe they can tell us that.

**ALEX**

Wilde raises a hand, sort of respectfully. Again in a way that's kind of slightly un Wilde like. I think it's worth knowing how dangerous this is. It's a very different thing to take a walk in a park and find out a lifechanging piece of information that to go through a trial, the likes of which none of us will survive, for the same.

**HELEN**

It sounded like it was some kind of maze with dangerous things in.

**BRYN**

Sumutnyerl is it your intention for us to go into the garden and talk to the residents there. Obviously if the blight is the danger that you say then perhaps we should not approach the blight.

**ALEX**

I would value the insight of someone other than myself. You should not approach in the night.

**BRYN**

It is a dangerous place then?

**ALEX**

There are more than ancestors within the garden now.

**HELEN**

Oh.

**ALEX**

There are some within who would be able to confuse you, draw you away, kill you with a word. Most of these are kept at bay by the sunlight. To go in at night I would forbid.

**BRYN**

Well that seems very sensible then.

**BEN**

We'll make camp and make a plan then. You're coming with us right?

**ALEX**

I would ask to, yes. Sohra immediately volunteers and Sumutnyerl's like – you know this cannot be.

**BEN**

Can't have both of you.

**ALEX**

Myself and my representatives. To have both of us, Sohra is not a representative of Yerlik. Sohra is a representative of the clawed one and as such these things are not possible.

**BEN**

Fine. And you're having all of us in there or is there a specific number of representatives that we can bring?

**ALEX**

I would say all would be better than some.

**BEN**

Well if there's something in there that could kill us with a word maybe we do need all of us.

**ALEX**

This is my thoughts.

**HELEN**

This garden is about your religion, your faith.

**ALEX**

Yes

**HELEN**

I have a different belief. Would I be in more danger? Would I attract danger to the others?

**ALEX**

The garden itself does not deal in such boundaries. The creatures within take issue with life, not with factions therein.

**HELEN**

Alright.

**ALEX**

You are no more nor less a target.

**BRYN**

You said this is a hallowed place to your people and are there any observances we must take or perform we enter in the morning.

**ALEX**

There are a few basic cleansing rituals which we can take. That is straightforward. There are two more rules when entering the garden. The

first being you need to respect the garden. Just because it is sick does not mean it is evil.

**BRYN**

Of course, of course.

**ALEX**

If we are able to either cleanse or at least understand the malady yes, but to harm the garden itself would be a gross violation. Also the garden accepts more than just the people who are laid to rest here. As we've said it is a garden where the veil runs thin. You are likely to encounter those who have come before who may wish to speak with you, who may wish to warn you, who may wish to converse with you. We have very little experience with outsiders but certainly with Nik, he encountered those that had come before.

**HELEN**

Do you mean people we used to know?

**ALEX**

It is possible, yes. Certainly for him it was...

**(laughing)**

**BEN**

Another one!

**LYDIA**

Both me and Ben go like urgh, time to crack out the old voices!

**BEN**

Here we go again! No I wasn't thinking about that.

**HELEN**

Azu reaches down and like clasps Hamid's hand.

**BRYN**

Oh dear.

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

You need to understand the garden will not show you what it wants. You may see no one at all. It is as dangerous to ascribe hope to this possibility as it is fear. You must enter with an open mind. Not with a need.

**BEN**

Yeah

**LYDIA**

Cel looks both hopeful and also white with shock. That's two things. Two lots of things on a face and it's such a gangly face.

**ALEX**

But again there is a malady within the garden. This is beyond my knowledge. We may encounter things pretending to be things from your past. We may encounter things from your past that have changed, are new, are different. I don't know.

**BEN**

Do we have any way of knowing if we can trust the information that we gain from this garden because our intent here is to find some information which will help us combat the situation. If we can't trust anything the garden says or you have no way of verifying any information that the garden gives us then there is no point going into the garden.

**ALEX**

Wilde from the side sort of leans in – it's a very good point. Misinformation is potentially worse than no information.

**BEN**

Especially when delivered from the mouth of a dead loved one.

**ALEX**

Wilde gives Zolf a dead eye stare and it's just – exactly. I couldn't have put it better myself. I think we all have people from our past that it would be complicated.

**BEN**

And out of character as a PSA for the audience and the players as well I've been doing a lot of thinking between recording sessions about the thing that Alex and I said about, like hey is Wilde and Zolf romantic or platonic, like you know we'll leave it open. I've been thinking about it and so personally for me, I would not be comfortable roleplaying a romantic relationship with a real life historical figure. That's just a very personal decision that I'm making and me having to roleplay it in real time. I'm not saying that that couldn't be a valid story option but it's not one that I personally want to do.

**LYDIA**

Ah

**BEN**

So just to be very clear for anyone listening, in episodes and stuff it will be like a deep platonic connection but it is not romantic.

**ALEX**

Yeah and for what it's worth as well...it's worth clarifying from my end this was always going to be...I was doing to pick up what Ben was putting down in this regard. Like we said this isn't something that was pre-planned or anything so that isn't us having to change anything. Yeah, makes sense to me. I'm fine with that. It scans perfectly fine.

**HELEN**

I was just going to compliment you and say you've always been good about romances between NPCs and PCs and you've always been clear about it's about our comfort and cool, thank you.

**ALEX**

Apart from Carter who I never mentioned before is just a hottie. Just a massive hottie

**(laughing)**

But I never brought it up. Which I think was a missed step at my end. You know, canonically, Carter's a hottie and I mis-stepped by not making more of a thing of that.

**LYDIA**

Actually I mean that's not...we know that's not a recon, in fact that just...it's one of those clues where you're like, that explains how he managed to get away with so many things.

**(laughing)**

**BEN**

A privileged hottie. There we go.

**LYDIA**

They're just...people look at that cute baby face and they're like it couldn't have been him

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

So I'm going to jump back into the situation just a little while longer. Which is Sumutnyerl is sort of considering what you said about that and so on and effectively, in a way that you've started to spot his characteristic goes into herself. Sort of leaning in, giving a quiet contemplation....really giving it proper thought instead of just responding and genuinely after, like, 40 seconds. A minute of solid just quiet contemplation – to my knowledge the garden has never lied. It has sought to harm with its truths.

**HELEN**

Oh dear.

**ALEX**

Even with the blight, though the people who appear may not necessarily be the people you once knew, I am aware of no untruths from the garden. If the garden wished to harm you it would show you a truth that would do you more than harm than any falsehood could.

**BEN**

Let it try honestly but yes good to know.

**LYDIA**

Cel is just grey but that's cool.

**ALEX**

It's incredibly important that I have not explained properly the garden will respond to what you bring with you. If you head in seeking one thing it will provide you what it knows you need based upon that desire. If you go in seeking absolution all that will be known is that the garden knows you seek absolution, not that it will grant you such.

**HELEN**

Ok.

**ALEX**

I struggle to explain this.

**LYDIA**

These are concepts that are deep in cultures and they're not always easy to transfer to people that don't have the background but I think you've got to cross the point that is – and I'm grasping and running my hands through my hair because Cel is Cel – yeah we understand, we may see sad or bad things but truths that could hurt a lot more than the lies but probably useful truths and also we might get killed. I think is also the thing. And don't hurt the garden except, I'm guessing, maybe if it attacks you first like if there's these creatures that could kill us with a word as we supposed to fight back.

**ALEX**

Correct.

**LYDIA**

Ok so we can...we don't just have to run away if they...if they say a kill word we can punch a kill arrow through their, you know what I mean....well maybe not a punch kill arrow. Yes.

**BEN**

I'll put my hand on Cel's, I dunno, bicep.

**LYDIA**

Yeah, yeah.

**ALEX**

I keep forgetting about the massive height difference due to Cel's lankiness.

**LYDIA**

That's cool. I think...I think we – Cel turns to everyone – I think that we get the gist. We're never going to understand necessarily the cosmology or the deep personal meaning of your culture without a lot more time spent which would be wonderful but I think we get the gist.

**HELEN**

Yes

**BEN**

Yeah and relatedly for any of us, now we know what we know, if you don't want to go in. Don't.

**ALEX**

This is incredibly important, yes. The garden is not to be entered by one who does not wish to be there because....

**HELEN**

It'll know.

**ALEX**

Yes.

**HELEN**

Alright.

**ALEX**

Skraak raises a claw. Just a question – how wide does this go? Am I expecting to see my parents? Is this just a...how does this – Skraak's kind of struggling to articulate. Sumutnyerl just goes – if you are able to think the garden will know

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and will respond as such and just gives a vague gesture. Skraak goes quiet again.

**BEN**

Which also scans with blue veins having all the knowledge of the people that get affected by it.

**HELEN**

Oh.

**ALEX**

I think if it's possible for us to learn more information...

**LYDIA**

I assume this is Wilde.

**ALEX**

...with a – yeah – with an understandable risk it feels like a calculated benefit to us.

**BEN**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

Alright.

**BRYN**

I suggest we make camp. Get some food, get some rest and we'll do a little bit of thinking to make sure we're in the best possible state of mind before we head in tomorrow morning.

**ALEX**

And that feels like a sensible break.

**LYDIA**

Yay!

**ALEX**

Where people can take a moment, process information and then basically just join hands and skip in with no care in the world.

**LYDIA**

Yeah, yeah.

**BEN**

Absolutely.

**LYDIA**

Well no that's cool. The sound of us all clicking into our back stories to check names

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

And welcome back. So as much as I would love to do a two to three time jump I feel like we might actually have some things that are worth discussing across a campfire in a way that I don't think we've had since like Grizzop was around. Like the campfire's chat a thing as a mechanism.

**BRYN**

You just said it would be dangerous to take emotional baggage into the following morning so I feel like this is our last chance to...

**ALEX**

You caught that did you?

**BRYN**

...to get at least a tiny fraction of it.

**LYDIA**

Drop your lore!

**ALEX**

So yeah with that in mind what I am going to do is say Sumutnyerl and Sohra have basically, as a courtesy to you, set up a campfire because with druid craft and so on it's trivial for them. They have suggested that between you and

them there should be someone on watch at all times just because, you know, these are the wilds but they've also respectfully said that they're going to have their own campfire a little way away because Sohra and Sumutnyerl need to have a little talk. A catch up. A little figure out of what's been going on there, you know, just pick at a few loose threads. So you are going to be left to your own devices unless you call them over. They are literally just over there but they're kind of dealing with their own stuff right now. You just have a campfire overlooking stuff. The only additional factor that I'll give you is that you are a slight way away from the bluff so you're not worried about a massive crosswind or anything. It's actually comparatively comfortable despite the cold but again, endure elements is still active, like it makes it much easier. There is a faint, almost tint shifted borealis as well amongst the garden. It is way more tinted blue. So you know how the borealis is full spectrum, this is very heavily blue shifted but there is a certain quality to it and for free, you all can see that as the night draws in and the blue starts to show a bit, yeah, all of the normal – he says – normal, creature movements seem to drop off and the whole spectre movement kind of like a ghost city. Lots of stuff going on down there.

**LYDIA**

It's full of ghosts!

**ALEX**

So yeah technically there is a slight blue glow peaking out over the bluff which you can see from where you are but you are away from that and out of the wind.

**BRYN**

I dunno, I reckon if we take off one of the ghost's masks it will turn out to have been Mr Higgins all along.

**ALEX**

It's just groundskeepers as far as the eye can see!

**BEN**

It'll be Figgis again!

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

Yes Figgis!

**ALEX**

Oh god! Now I'm tempted! Could you imagine if I hinged the entire campaign on Figgis!

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

I'm surprised that Brutor hasn't turned up

**ALEX**

Yet!

**HELEN**

Oh no! What if Brutor's dead?

**BEN**

We're going to have the Avengers assemble moment where like all of the different little groups pop out of the portal and we have a big fight.

**HELEN**

That would be cool, yes.

**ALEX**

So I am now handing over to you because I feel like if you've got any...clear your baggage basically. Please check baggage before entering the garden. If you have excessive baggage there may be additional charges in the form of will or fort saves. Thank you.

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

Ok, Azu's going to go and talk to Cel because Azu noticed Cel's face.

**LYDIA**

All kinds of colours. Yeah. Cel's just gonna be staring at the fire.

**HELEN**

Hi, hello.

**LYDIA**

Heya Azu. How you doing?

**HELEN**

Oh! Yes.

**LYDIA**

You good?

**HELEN**

Yes

**LYDIA**

That's cool.

**HELEN**

But I wanted to ask how you were doing because you did not look so good...not in a...you look good but like...

**LYDIA**

Oh thank you!

**HELEN**

You looked upset.

**LYDIA**

You look good as well. Azu I am old. I've lost people. My husband. He...

**HELEN**

Oh.

**LYDIA**

You know it's been, I think, five years now but...well he died of old age. He was an orc and we met when he was 25. We had some good years. Cel is staring at the fire.

**HELEN**

Aw

**LYDIA**

It would be wonderful to see him again but the garden wouldn't...it's dangerous to hope isn't it. Well I assume my first fiancé would be dead by now, I mean humans don't last that long. He might be in there. I don't know. Could clarify a few things but again it's dangerous to hope. Ha, ha.

**BEN**

Are we all just around the campfire right?

**ALEX**

Unless someone actively says otherwise.

**LYDIA**

I would say that Cel probably wouldn't be talking quite this openly if there were lots of people around.

**BEN**

So you've gone off to the side then?

**LYDIA**

Yeah. Well Cel's staring at the fire but you might be on the other side of the fire. Who knows? I mean maybe you can hear a bit of it but...

**BEN**

Basically I don't want to interrupt if this is supposed to just be a conversation between Cel and Azu but you are saying there's no point hoping and I'm literally a cleric of hope so I might have opinions about that.

**LYDIA**

That's fair. Ok. How about...

**ALEX**

Cel you need to hope or I'll be powerless!

**LYDIA**

That's fair. Ok how about Cel is staring at the fire, Azu is next to them and I would assume that you may well be within earshot. I think that's fair. Yeah. I mean you don't wanna hope and then, like what could he say? What could he say? Nice being dead. I could tell him his boys are doing ok.

**HELEN**

Oh.

**LYDIA**

They were last time I spoke to them.

**HELEN**

Did you have them together?

**LYDIA**

No, no. They were his from before. They'd be about your age now. They were sailors like him and a little after he died they took the ship back...they do the trade routes over the Pacific so I think with the storms around Japan they'd probably have been around the Pacific Islands more than coming all the way over. That would make sense. They're not fools. I left a letter with Jasper in case they go back. So maybe it wouldn't be accurate for me to tell him that

the boys are doing ok because I haven't seen them four years. They were doing ok. I'm sure they're doing ok. If I saw them that would be a bit of a...oh no. you'd like them.

**HELEN**

I'm sure I would. I mean I like you so I'm sure anyone that you associated with would be...

**LYDIA**

They're good lads.

**HELEN**

I'm sure they are.

**LYDIA**

Anyone that you're looking forward or not looking forward to seeing?

**HELEN**

Well you know there's always the friends that Hamid and I...

**LYDIA**

Oh yes, sorry. Yes.

**HELEN**

Oh no, no. I am also sorry for you in a condolences way

**LYDIA**

It's all...I mean there's so many people that...well there's...those are the people I'd like to meet. I don't know about the people from the village, the town. They might not be happy.

**HELEN**

Yeah

**LYDIA**

That was a while ago though. You know, they're probably not...this is the veil between worlds right. After like 60 years you'd have gone somewhere else, right? Yeah? I mean you wouldn't stick around just for the possibility of telling me how much I messed up. Ha, ha! It's going to be fine. Oh well. It's gonna be fine. It'll be cool. It'll be great. It'll be good. I hope you get to see your friends and that they're all happy and stuff.

**HELEN**

Well it sounds...oh, I suppose you weren't...one of them managed to leave a letter to us actually and it sounded like they were happy. I mean Sasha lived a very long time which is...which I'm very pleased about because when I first met her she was dying.

**LYDIA**

That is an excellent turn out for the books. Those books turned out good. Well done for those books. That's the one that got stuck in the past?

**HELEN**

Yes with Grizzop who was the...who was the little ferocious goblin who was a very determined fellow.

**LYDIA**

Those stories sound fun.

**HELEN**

Yes. I mean he seems to have died defending Sasha it sounds like which I think he would've appreciated. He never did expect to stick around for very long and it would be worth it to give your life for Sasha.

**LYDIA**

She sounds really cool.

**(laughing)**

What an excellent character!

**BRYN**

You two would definitely get along!

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

What a wonderful being. Well done to whoever made that!

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

I'm more worried about seeing people that I don't expect to see there since I haven't seen anyone from my home for a very long time.

**LYDIA**

Oh yeah.

**HELEN**

But I suppose we have to go in there with no expectations really.

**LYDIA**

No I'm trying to cleanse the expectations. Like sometimes saying it out loud that gets it out of your head. So you don't...you're not just thinking it so that's the checking in the baggage thing which is obviously something that doesn't...I suppose air ships that would be a familiar turn of phrase...anyway from that out of character ramble Cel says – it sounded like your town was doing ok. It's not the centre of the action.

**HELEN**

Yeah

**LYDIA**

I hope that you don't see anyone you don't expect.

**HELEN**

I hope the same for you.

**LYDIA**

Staring at fire recommence.

**HELEN**

Yes Azu sort of sits there to be like visible supporting presence thingy.

**BEN**

I think at that point Zolf will like cough awkwardly.

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

I think that point Zolf loudly declares the word "cough"

**(laughing)**

**BEN**

Hey, couldn't help overhearing. Just...it would be remiss of me to point out, and I think you've basically got it but there ain't anything wrong with hope.

There is something wrong with expectation. You can hope, that's the thing that keeps you going.

**LYDIA**

Yes

**BEN**

Expectation, that's the thing that disappoint you. It's ok to hope.

**LYDIA**

Thank you Zolf. The night continues...are we going to play out the night in real time. We're just going to stare awkwardly, quietly.

**ALEX**

Look here's the thing, I need to give you chance to get stuff of your chests. My chest is lovely and clear.

**BRYN**

Much later in the evening Hamid is gonna approach Azu. He does not want Zolf or Wilde or Skraak to overhear this conversation so he might well wait until some people are asleep and someone's on watch and even...

**HELEN**

Sure. Azu will happily chat to Hamid at all times.

**BRYN**

Azu?

**HELEN**

Mm?

**BRYN**

Can I ask you a big question?

**HELEN**

Oh those are always good. Alright.

**BRYN**

I know...I'm just, I feel like the warnings we've had it's important to try and address these things if we can before we go into the garden and I mean obviously I'm really happy we have our friends back but is what we did wrong?

**HELEN**

What do you mean?

**BRYN**

We met Apophis and Apophis explained why resurrection was banned and why it hadn't been done in so long and then we come here and we meet these people who have such a different set of rules and so much was clearly what, you know, I was brought up to believe wasn't necessarily true because there's

people here and look at how we were told there was nothing outside...but the reasons, when we met Apophis it seems like the reasons against the practice of resurrection was good and then in the moment of course I didn't even question because I just wanted our friends back and the chance to have them back was so...did we do the right thing?

**HELEN**

Well in terms of breaking rules I think it's been proven that the meritocrats are not entirely infallible considering what's happened so perhaps not all of their rules are good.

**BRYN**

Indeed.

**HELEN**

I never paid much attention. I knew they were there. Most of the rules I was aware of, seemed fair and were tailored to...so for example, when I was growing up it was don't kill people. Don't steal things. That's all fine and dandy but I think don't bring back someone who has died before their time. I think that's a much bigger question and not one that can have a yes or no answer and it was important...oh I've just realised I didn't really tell you...so the whole process, you had to check if they wanted to come back. That was the whole thing and I think...

**BRYN**

Oh well you said Meerk didn't and that's why he didn't with the others I guess. So I suppose yeah...but you had to like talk to them?

**HELEN**

Yes. Oh. It was very strange Hamid but I can't imagine that it was a bad thing to do. I mean I can't speak for Zolf or for Cel but where I took Carter from did not seem like a good place for him.

**BRYN**

That's good and obviously I'm so happy they're back but Azu...if it's ok to bring them back why...why not more people? Why not my sister?

**HELEN**

Oh Hamid.

**BRYN**

We were there. We were right there and couldn't do anything to help her in the moment but what if we had her body, we could've...if it's ok to bring back our friends in this situation what about Aziza.

**HELEN**

Hamid – and Azu is going to more hand holding, hand holding galore is happening in this episode and Azu's going to say – something that I have learned is one shouldn't worry too much about what you should or could have done once it's already happened. We can only affect what we do in the future

and clearly it is possible that Aziza could've been brought back but she wasn't and I don't think anyone could fault you for not doing so because you literally were not aware it was an option.

**BRYN**

That's true. That's true. You have to...you have to make the best decision you can in the moment but you're right, it just feels like so many things that I used to believe...

**ALEX**

Forgive me for interjecting during a scene but it will be quite useful for you, Bryn, specifically.

**BRYN**

Sure

**ALEX**

You would not even need to do a knowledge check to know this. One of the things that hasn't necessarily come up but is a factor is the resource cost, in terms of doing it, in meritocratic lands is like unconscionably vast and you've seen no evidence of that resource cost where you are now.

**BRYN**

Yeah so I think you mentioned at some point and I can't remember if it was in character, out of character or even just extraneous world information, that

part of the reason it was easier is because of the higher level of background wild magic essentially. I can't remember...

**ALEX**

I've lost track of where that's been explicitly stated but I can tell you that I'm just going to say now that you know for a fact, and this is not me trying to steer the conversation in any way, there is factor at play here which is you know objectively it would be impossible to do that kind of resurrection of every, single person who's ever taken before their time in meritocratic lands. Like it's a physical impossibility and you know that objectively to be the case. There's just...it would be too resource intensive.

**BEN**

Unless you used the Hear of Aphrodite which didn't have any resource expenditure.

**LYDIA**

And also they are one of the richest families in the world.

**ALEX**

Yeah and this is what you both have said are the additional factors at play here. Which is, yeah, a single item and a...

**BRYN**

I mean Hamid is not necessarily thinking through this super logically either. They're maybe...this is an emotional kind of processing as much as anything else.

**BEN**

Because otherwise he'd work out it was the meritocrat's fault.

**BRYN**

Well, if I may be permitted to finish the conversation!

**ALEX**

Again I did not mean to interject but I thought it was an important factor that's worth bearing in mind.

**BRYN**

Azu it feels like so much of what I used to believe just isn't true anymore. I had so much faith in the meritocrats. So much faith in what they taught us and then during this crisis they completely abdicated their role but also even before that so much of the system they put in place. I used to think it worked so well and have seen so much now that showed me it never did and you just have so much faith in Aphrodite and it's something that I always look up to you for and I just don't know where my faith is anymore except in you and Zolf, Cel and Wilde and Skraak and everyone really I guess but maybe that's enough.

**HELEN**

I think it is. I mean I have Aphrodite as like a...oh...well it's hard to explain but if you don't have a belief in a god I think the belief in other people is just as valid and strong. One of the reasons that I believe so strongly in Aphrodite is because I've seen...I can demonstrate her presence. I can see the good that she does, that believing in her does for others.

**BRYN**

Oh of course, yeah. I think there's a lot to recommend all the gods but it's just never been my path to follow any of them that closely.

**HELEN**

But my point is the meritocrats have never proven themselves in that way to me. Meeting Apophis was very impressive and he was clearly very intelligent but enough to govern several continents, clearly not.

**BRYN**

Yeah. I used to think so but I don't think I do anymore. Thankyou Azu for talking to me.

**HELEN**

Any time you know.

**BRYN**

Of course and...well I know I said it before but I hope you know you can talk to me about stuff as well. I don't want you always taking on other people's problems and never getting to share yours.

**HELEN**

I know Hamid.

**BRYN**

Feeling alright about tomorrow morning?

**HELEN**

Oh. Broadly yes actually.

**BRYN**

I'm glad. I'm glad.

**HELEN**

As long as no one I've killed turns up to have a yell at me.

**(laughing)**

**LYDIA**

Yeah I hadn't even thought of all the people we bloody murdered!

**ALEX**

Yeah there's an encounter. What's this? Every person who ever died b your hands in this campaign in single file ready to have another go at you.

**LYDIA**

Oh my gosh!

**BEN**

So many blokes and lads.

**LYDIA**

Hamid's gonna see the kobolds

**ALEX**

Thousands of blokes and lads as far as the eye can see.

**BRYN**

That would be quite distressing but I'm sure they didn't really imply that would be the case anyway.

**ALEX**

I think that might be a sensible place at this point to...

**BRYN**

I think we'll be ok Azu.

**ALEX**

...to round that conversation out and I'd like to...

**BRYN**

Hamid gives Azu a big hug and then goes to bed.

**LYDIA**

And obviously over the break before the next episode Bryn can restate Hamid as a cleric of friends.

**(laughing)**

**BEN**

Oi!

**BRYN**

[Singing I'll be there for you if the rain starts to fall.]

**BEN**

Oh god! Alright yeah, you're welcome to that!

**(laughing)**

**ALEX**

So I am going to finish on an image if I may. Which is I'm going to jump time ahead a little bit. I am going to sort of briefly explain that your cleansing ritual basically consists of, there is a fresh water source nearby. Despite the cold it seems to run clear but not warm. It is quite cold. And you basically are expected to bathe yourselves one at a time, clean yourselves up. It's not secretive in any way. Like Sumutnyerl does so and it's quite ritualistic but it pretty much just comes down to, you know, don't track mud in. But it is careful and it is meditative but it's not really an RP thing. So what I will do is I will jump ahead towards you arrayed towards the edge of the garden with the morning sun now streaming in and from where you are you don't see any spectral movement or anything like that. You're just facing the oddest garden that you're ever seen and Wilde turns to all of you just before you head in and just says – if it's any consolation I've sort of gone there and come back. It's not all that bad you know.

**(laughing)**

Ben's face! I'll close on that. Right so between now and next week all we need to do is just take all of our emotional baggage that we've now aired and just neatly iron it and fold it, press it and put it into our cupboards so that we can have some nice old fashioned horrific awfulness.

**LYDIA**

Yay!

**ALEX**

Let's get back down to brass tacks, yeah. Until then, I guess, bye everyone.

**EVERYONE**

Bye!

**[Show Theme - Outro]**

**ALEX**

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