

RQG – 196 – A Brief Catchup

Content Warnings

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[Show Theme - Intro]

ALEX

Hello and welcome to episode 196 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

Rusty Quill Gaming – 196 – A Brief Catchup

ALEX

And who are you playing?

BEN

Zolf Smith

BRYN

Hamid Saleh Haroun al-Tahan

LYDIA

Cel Sidebottom

HELEN

And Azu

ALEX

And how are you feeling?

LYDIA

Yeah.

BEN

Antsy, antsy for action.

HELEN

Yeah.

(Laughter)

ALEX

So, I thought what we could do is have two to three sessions of extended introspection per, per character.

BEN

Great.

ALEX

And then we can return to the campaign later.

BEN

Yeah, love it.

LYDIA

Yeah, will saves and based on that ...

ALEX

Or alternatively ...

LYDIA

... a bit of meditation, you know.

BEN

Today's recording will just be 45 minutes of in character meditation.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

I quit.

(Group laughter)

LYDIA

That's actually Zolf's line.

HELEN

I'm just imaging Zolf very annoyed lying there with cucumber slices on his eyes and eventually storming off.

(Group laughter)

LYDIA

The animation is, it looks so relaxing and then as it zooms in you realise that actually his teeth are grinding.

BRYN

There's an eye twitching behind the cucumber.

ALEX

So, in terms of what we are going to be picking up from at the end of the last episode you obviously got shown the device. And the device is effectively not hideous but an in-elegant amalgam of science in terms of botany, biology, chemistry, physics. It's a big pile of science.

BRYN

Pretty sure it combines technical elements from Mr Ceiling, the simulacrum and Shoin just to really tie together ...

LYDIA

And Kew Gardens.

BRYN

... everything we've met.

ALEX

That is correct like I said it's a big pile of science. Because that's how science works and we all know that a scientist knows all science because it's one field.

LYDIA

And each science is stackable.

(Group laughter)

LYDIA

It's like Lego, science is like Lego right and each discipline is like a different colour and that's how science works.

BEN

Because everyone knows the arts are actually connects.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

Oh, I hate it, I hate it so much. I never wanted to be on team connect ever. Anyway one of the last things that was happening is people, Cel, Hamid and Skraak, yeah, wanted to have a look over, basically plans, the device, etc. to see whether it seems on the level. See whether it's the kind of thing that in the real world, if someone saw a pile of science would go that's actually junk. And to see whether there's actually some stuff going on there. So, I'd like to do that first.

Can I please get a technical role from the three of you of the field of your choice cause it's all of them. I'd advise not nobility, but you could, and I'll find a way to make it work.

LYDIA

Alchemy, I guess.

ALEX

Yeah Alchemy's fine, Alchemy's fine. For the sake of it as well, Zolf and Azu if you have anything that you want to bring to that as well feel free but last session it was pretty much I'm not a science.

BEN

Zolf is unconcerned. It's just like great we have a plan let's do it.

ALEX

Yeah.

HELEN

Azu's happy to let the people who are good at it figure out if it's good or not.

ALEX

Thanks, I was gonna resort to it's quite a noble looking brain. So, I'm glad you're safe with that.

(Group laughter)

LYDIA

33.

ALEX

4, knowledge alchemy, ok.

LYDIA

Yeah.

BRYN

Hamid got a natural 20 on arcana.

ALEX

Yeah.

BRYN

So, that's a total of 37.

LYDIA

Ooh, crikey.

BRYN

Skraak only managed 18 on knowledge engineering.

ALEX

In which case then, Skraak very quickly comes to the conclusion, going I'm not sure what it does but I know it's gonna work by which I mean the bits are connecting right, nothing is mechanically wrong with it but that's like base level, you know, that, that isn't physically broken.

In terms then of the higher roles, both Cel and Hamid come to the conclusion that, yeah, as far as you can tell ... and you're getting pretty good at this by virtue of exposure, this should, in principle, do what it is expected to do. It could, in fact, probably be hardwired from here but you would need to leave it

where it is, connect it to something about a few miles away at least and walk through the middle of London carrying cables and hope no one notices it.

(Laughter)

Even then it would be a bit of a push.

BRYN

Yeah.

ALEX

And you can see how that killswitch, whatever it is that was meant to be would interact with it though you aren't necessarily able to discern the exact specifics of the killswitch to just make one yourself. There's a couple of elements there that are variable. But both of you do come and notice there is an error in the design. It is a minor error, effectively, there's a mechanism built in there to protect the brain that's in the jar, the Babbage brain, from feedback, meaning it should, in principle, the machine should work, it should do what is stated, however, it looks like it's been built in such a way that hopefully the Babbage brain would survive. That the mechanism that's being used to make the Babbage brain survive this process isn't gonna work. You probably could fix it, but it will function in its role but it's going to cost Babbage's brain.

BRYN

It's gonna take control of the network successfully.

ALEX

Yes.

BRYN

But the feedback will kill the brain.

LYDIA

And would that mean that nothing is there to take over which could then ...

ALEX

Oh no, you think it would be ok for long enough to do what it needs to do but it's gonna ... basically Babbage will burn out.

LYDIA

Sorry, I just ... I thought that the point was to have Babbage replace the mind at the centre, so if Babbage pops ...

ALEX

And then relinquish control.

LYDIA

... oh right, ok.

BRYN

Yeah, they just need him to survive for long enough to be like do what you want, bye.

LYDIA

Yeah.

ALEX

But according to the current design he will go do what you want bye, oh that was a big bye, pop.

LYDIA

Oh ok, so that actually functions ...

ALEX

Whereas there is a way to modify it so that Babbage isn't lost in the process should you wish.

LYDIA

I mean but he would still be a brain in a vat.

ALEX

That is correct.

LYDIA

Right, that's an interesting ... but that opens up, is that really an error or is that Tesla not wanting to confront the idea of ...

ALEX

It's also a good question.

LYDIA

... leaving his friend as a brain in a vat.

BRYN

The other issue is that if Babbage survives and lives long enough and was somehow taken control of otherwise would he be able to re-extend control into the network.

ALEX

It would take more work than what's currently there.

BRYN

Ok, so that's not a risk necessarily. Once he has successfully withdrawn the tendrils, he can't just push them back in?

ALEX

No, it doesn't really work like that.

BRYN

Ok.

LYDIA

Ok.

BRYN

Hamid and Cel meet eyes having both realised the same implication.

LYDIA

Yeah.

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Hamid shall we I ... I just wanna ... I just ...

BRYN

Quick sidebar maybe.

LYDIA

Quick, quick sidebar on ... I just, I don't want to talk about these formulas and things in a way that I know ... I know is ...

BRYN

I mean I think it looks like it's ...

LYDIA

... I don't like to talk about things that ... or confuse people in front of them like so I will ...

(Group laughter)

BRYN

... I think it's gonna work, that's the headline. It's good, good news.

ALEX

There is a very, very delicate bing, bong but like an actual bell dinging, bing, bong, like a doorbell.

LYDIA

Um, what, why doesn't everyone else go and, and get that and then we can discuss or should we go in to ...

ALEX

Ada's just like oh yes, yeah of course. Hurry's off, Tesla doesn't seem to have noticed.

LYDIA

Ok, so Cel's just gonna go in to the other, like into the staircase thing, area or the ... no the alternate lab, I'm trying to ...

ALEX

Yeah, yeah.

LYDIA

... remembering what it was and, and sort of hope Hamid follows.

ALEX

The workshop as opposed to the computer lab.

LYDIA

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALEX

(Laughter)

LYDIA

So, that, that ... that brain isn't gonna survive ...

(Group laughter)

BRYN

No.

LYDIA

But do you think that's intentional. The way it's put together it looks like it's ... it's trying to protect the brain but it, it's not, but I don't know if digging in to ... like motivation, human science is not my strongest, uh, science, I have many strong sciences I could talk through but not the motivations that lead ...

BRYN

Yeah, I, I don't ...

LYDIA

... leads them on to ... not, I don't know, is Babbage in pain there, is that something that they might want to ... I don't, I don't want to unpick, there, there's a lot of complicated ...

BRYN

I mean can we communicate with Babbage. I feel like it should be his decision I guess.

LYDIA

That, that sounds ... yeah, I mean maybe he loves being a brain in a vat, I don't wanna judge, it's ... it could be great.

BRYN

(Laughter).

LYDIA

I've considered it a few times.

ALEX

I love that this came up in the Shoin Institute, almost exactly that same phrasing.

LYDIA

That's because Cel daydreams consistently.

(Group laughter)

You know like I mean maybe you can control the octopuses from here.

BRYN

I don't want to necessarily bother Tesla with more of this but maybe if we talk to, talk to Ada about it she might ...

LYDIA

That, that is ... see that is why you understand people and yes we should ask.

BRYN

Ok.

LYDIA

Ada, Ada would probably know and she's friends with both of them and she may know if it's appropriate to talk to Babbage, like maybe Babbage is perfectly chatty.

BRYN

Yeah, yeah.

ALEX

Would people be ok then with a minor time jump. We're talking like 15 minutes tops.

BRYN

Sure.

LYDIA

Yeah.

HELEN

Sure.

ALEX

Ada comes back down the stairs, mid-conversation with a wild-haired and familiar friend.

BRYN

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Oh, Professor ...

ALEX

Oh, oh hey ...

BRYN

It's so good to see you. How are you?

ALEX

Hey, I'm good, yeah.

In terms of the look of Einstein, you remember the post sort of Rome jump he'd gone very, kind of Mad Max to the point where it was almost affectation, maybe even actual affectation..

BRYN

Sure.

ALEX

He seems to have reined back in a little bit from there. You can actually see some torso underneath ammo belts that don't have any ammunition in, that kind of thing. He is wearing an eye patch not over one eye, just here.

LYDIA

On the forehead, right, yeah.

ALEX

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Just above the eye as if it were to be flicked down but he doesn't seem the worse for wear. Maybe a little bit thinner, maybe a little bit more city miles on him but he seems alright.

Oh hey, I, I didn't know you would be here the communication doesn't work with the, with the anti-magic field and the wardings and you look good I thought you were dead.

BRYN

You to, you to.

ALEX

Well, not all of you.

BRYN

It, it's really nice to see you Professor.

LYDIA

I don't know who you are and I'm glad I'm not dead.

ALEX

I don't know who you are either, hello.

BRYN

Cel, this is Professor Einstein who helped us previously a lot. Professor this is my friend Cel, pronounced ...

ALEX

Oh hey, Cel, cool.

BRYN

... they're our Alchemical expert and they've been a wonderful friend and, and have done so much good while working with us ...

LYDIA

Oh, Hamid.

ALEX

I really like your goggles.

LYDIA

Yeah, I'm ... I'm liking this whole, this whole getup, do you, do you make the belts yourself, they look extremely practical.

ALEX

I mostly use them to carry snacks.

LYDIA

Ah yes.

ALEX

Unfortunately, my, my thing doesn't really need much in the way of components, maybe a little bit, so mostly it's like you say this is my beans pouch and then over here we have my sweets pouch ...

LYDIA

Ah, I see.

ALEX

... that one's running a little low. I have two water pouches cause you can never drink too much water, it's very important for you.

LYDIA

I know, you gotta stay hydrated, you gotta ... you've absolutely gotta stay hydrated or, or ...

ALEX

Ada's just kind of lost ...

LYDIA

... you know, the skills don't work do they.

ALEX

... in this conversation watching the back and forth.

I'm gonna, if I may, accelerate it a little further because there will be nothing beyond ...

We both like talking a lot right.

(Group laughter)

LYDIA

It was, it was on a knife edge there of Cel having like a moment of jealousy of oh look there's a wild-haired like science chatterer ...

(Group laughter)

ALEX

What I am going to do though is, with everyone's permission jump ahead a little bit to ...

I got a briefing to give you, I'm just gonna lay it out for you as, as a GM. I got a mission briefing I need to give you all. So, unless anyone objects I'm gonna push you in to that meeting room.

LYDIA

That's cool.

HELEN

Sure. I'm happy to be pushed.

ALEX

In which case then I'm gonna jump time ahead. I'll say that ... again, this is for the sake of expediency, there's been some catchup. Einstein is basically happy to have said what he's been doing but it's mostly did a bunch of stuff with the Harlequins, didn't really pan out then got stuck helping a lot of people evacuate Cairo and now I've been sort of chasing down some stuff for this lot. He only became aware of this lot after being contacted by Barret. He was not

aware of it until comparatively recently. And his read seems to be similar to yours, which is that you know, that's a big pile of science, uh, but, you know it's not, it's not his field cause he doesn't really have one. He's just good at teleporting.

HELEN

I would like to say that for flavour, Azu has definitely given him like the biggest hug you can imagine. And he's quite a small man if I remember correctly so just ...

(Group laughter)

ALEX

True but he does take a little bit of time to show you that he's been working on his guns and, you know, they're ...

HELEN

... so many compliments on the old man's science guns.

(Laughter)

ALEX

... there's definitely like a muscle in there between both arms there's maybe one.

BRYN

Hamid will get in on the hug action, absolutely.

HELEN

Aww.

ALEX

So, I am gonna say that there is a warm hubbub of conversation as Wilde comes and sits in.

There's an actual briefing room, there is a, there is a conference table with fancy, slightly threadbare chairs that are slightly mismatched but there's even a projector screen with an old style like magic lamp style projector.

HELEN

And literally moving ...

LYDIA

Magic lantern I assume.

ALEX

You know what, yeah, there's a magic, magic lantern. In terms of who's in the room, Wilde, all of yourselves, Einstein, Skraak, Sumutnyerl has eventually slumped in, seems fine with all of you but is still clearly real peeved at being in a certain person's house basically. And then last, but not least, Ada comes in. Augusta was not especially interested and was probably even a little bit disparaging. But, you know, that's how she rolls. So, Ada sets up, goes over to the magic, magic lantern ...

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Uh, thanks everyone for, for coming here, I know it's all a bit rushed but when is it not. I'd ask if you can keep questions till the end because otherwise I'll lose my thread and that would be rubbish.

Yeah, ok, she pulls the lever and then clunk a, uh, slide comes in to place which is an exterior of the Svalbardian Vault.

BRYN

Ah ...

HELEN

What does that look like.

ALEX

It's not actually especially impressive and I would say that it's obviously Svalbardian and if anyone doesn't know like, it's immediately just said by the people who do, enough people in this room would recognise it. And it is, at first glance, quite unassuming. I want you to imagine a sort of, like an ice-shelf or like an icepack or whatever. And then you have a smallish, worked stone front that then seems to lead down in to the side of the mountain or glacier, it's hard to tell in the image. It does seem to have vaulted doors or whatever but beyond that it seems like a very small entrance to a city. You could maybe get two Azus walking abreast. That said, there is what seems to be a path leading in towards that main entrance that goes out of shot. Maybe like a road or something.

So, we've ... with the thanks of Einstein ...

I'm Einstein, yes, hello, that's me.

... we've been scouting out effectively places and we're fairly certain we've found the killswitch that we need to cannibalise for advice, and we believe it's in, in Svalbard.

BRYN

Oh, is this the one that Grizzop commissioned at the Cult of Hephaestus to, to build?

ALEX

Ada's immediately now like oh uh ...

BEN

Hang on, isn't it supposed to be questions at the end, Ada do you want to continue?

BRYN

You did say, sorry, sorry.

ALEX

... uh, yes, yeah. Ada starts sort of shuffling her notes at the moment and comes back.

Yeah, yes, questions at the end, yes. Cool, yes, so ... she clunks it, goes forward a slide, clunks it back and then clunks it forward again.

Ok, so that was the entrance and then obviously within you start seeing a massive plan. It seems to be a very, very old document that's been like magically illusioned or photographed or something similar. It's an incomplete one.

The actual interior is very large because it, it's a city. It has an unassuming front but there is a whole city under there with a number of entrances most of which seem to have collapsed or, or boarded.

Next slide ... uh, me yes, clunk ...

So, we, we have a series of sort of like documents that were effectively put on that seem to be like diplomatic missives and so on. We managed to sort of find out through some contacts and with Barret's help that the population of Svalbard sort of dropped out of contact. Obviously, once the infection was going on an envoy was actually sent to the city and, and the, the envoys, it was sort of abandoned. And there wasn't infection there, there weren't, you know, there weren't moving people there. There was no one there and it, it was locked up but they, they kind of said they got the impression that it might be a little but dead inside. As far as we are able to tell we think that they may have had a seed in the vault similar to, to in London and so on. And we think it may have triggered but wrongly somehow.

BEN

Yeah, we, we found them.

Next slide.

ALEX

You, you've already been into Svalbard?

BEN

No, we've been ... next ... yeah.

HELEN

Let's stop interrupting.

ALEX

Ok, right, yes, next slide.

LYDIA

This whole time Cel has been like bouncing up and down like the kid in a classroom ...

(Group laughter)

... that knows the answer. But not saying anything so like ... the anger, like the most resentful they've ever looked at Zolf, like ... Zolf spoke up and I was trying so hard not to.

(Group laughter)

HELEN

But it, it continues.

BEN

I didn't ask the question.

HELEN

Ah, true, true.

(Group laughter)

BEN

I can make all the statements I want.

LYDIA

But, no, Cel was also going to answer ... I know the answer, I know, I know, I know the answer to this. And they didn't ... so proud of themselves.

ALEX

So, next slide, uh, yes, backwards, forwards, back, forwards, yes, yes, clunk. It then is showing what is effectively some correspondence which appears to have like symbology from the Hephaestus lot.

So, we, we received a missive from the Cult of Hephaestus who when things started going bad they sort of implied that they might have a solution that they were working on in Svalbard which is obviously why we sent the envoy, well I

didn't send ... they sent the envoy because it was important. But then, because we couldn't get in, but now we can get in.

And then she just points at Einstein.

We, we think based on what they've said that the device may have interfered with the seed when it triggered or something which meant it triggered differently but we don't really have the data but we're pretty certain the device itself is in the city most likely pretty much the most secure place you can get. So, maybe like a, I don't know, a vault or a council chamber or a treasury or something like that, maybe a lab, I don't know. But, you know, somewhere that's gonna be secure. And we have managed with Einstein's help, again, thank you Einstein ...

I'm Einstein, yes, hello.

We, we've managed to isolate certain areas as being, you know, inaccessible and things like that but he's not actually able to go very far in by virtue of ...

It's warded, yeah. Turns out they don't like people teleporting in to their bedrooms. I mean I, I've seen it before it's kind of like this place, it's, it's not insulting ...

HELEN

Einstein, Einstein come on let, let's ... Ada, I'm very interested in what you have to say and so are all the rest of us and we'll be quite now.

ALEX

Oh, so anyway, yeah, we, we've, we've generated what we think is, is a plan of, uh, Einstein can get you a pass at the main entrance and in to sort of the, the ... it's like a, it's like a foyer because the warding ... there's a blank spot in the warding and then from there if you could, if you could go in and, and fetch the, the device from, from the secure bit and then bring it back out. Einstein could then bring you here and then, and then we could plug it in to the main device.

Any questions?

LYDIA

No, sounds good.

HELEN

I'm up for that, yes, yes.

BRYN

I, I agree with the plan I just ... to ask my previous question is this the Cult of Hephaestus who Grizzop commissioned the killswitch from, is that ... is that the link, is that ... is this where they went with it?

ALEX

Wilde, sort of asks Ada to go back a couple of slides and look at the documentation from the Hephaestus lot.

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Inconclusive, but my guess would be probably. The Hephaestus lot are secretive at the best of times. It kind of goes with their territory a little bit.

BEN

I mean does it matter, the point is they've got one, we should go get it.

ALEX

At the very least they thought they had one and even if it didn't work that's still ... what else we can do ...

BEN

Yeah, if we don't have it, we don't have it. So, let's get the one that might be it.

LYDIA

I've always wanted to go to Svalbard. Wilde turns to Ada ...

Did you have anything that you could maybe give us to equip up a bit because I'm ... let's be honest I don't think I'm the only person at the table here who assumes that the second that we're going to go in there, there's going to be nothing but death and monsters the whole way down right.

BRYN

Yeah.

LYDIA

I was hoping that also there would be like interesting mechanical devices, some of which may be traps.

ALEX

I mean, presumably.

LYDIA

But yes death and monsters to.

ALEX

Well, we're going to, I'm going to aim for less death than previously.

Ada looks awkwardly around and then goes I think we do have an armoury ...

BRYN

Oh.

ALEX

Yeah, Tesla's really about preparation, none of us actual know how to use the stuff and you'd be happy to welcome it. Augusta looks after a lot of it but, yeah, I think help yourself if that will help, do you think it'd help.

BEN

Yes.

BRYN

Yes. It never hurts to be prepared.

ALEX

In that case from our perspective we're good to go. I mean I'm guessing you might want a rest maybe stock up or something.

LYDIA

Oh, oh, one, one question what kind of monsters might we expect?

ALEX

Oh, good question, so, uh, yes, right, one second. I believe that you're already familiar with our friends the Root Guardians that are in London.

LYDIA

Oh the clicky, clicky friends?

ALEX

Yes, yes, they make the strange noises. We believe that those have been derived from the plant itself so it might stand to reason that even if that plant is different by virtue of whatever that mechanism is I would expect those to turn up again potentially. Beyond that, we believe that the plants have a sort of extra-planer quality, I, I'm current working under a theory that they're all the same plant they're just sort of different faces in the same plane.

BEN

Makes sense.

ALEX

So, it could just be that this face is damaged. So, I would expect probably planer entities or such. Thankfully, it should have been mostly protected by the heavy wardings that are all over the city, but, again, that might result in it coming out stranger rather than not at all. Beyond that I know that they ... I mean, you know, it's a very large subterranean city, no doubt if it's been left unguarded and unattended there might be some other more naturally occurring beasties that could have turned up.

LYDIA

Grand. So, it sounds like clicky friends we are trying to be quiet so, uh, in this equipment let's be looking for quiety stuff.

ALEX

There's one last thing before we go, which, well Einstein, Einstein you're the one who ...

Yeah, last point, this is news to Ada so, you know, I may have kind of poked around a little bit further than I should have just to, you know, see, I don't ... I just wanted to see you know. I, I ... I got as far as sort of the big main entrance far side of the foyer and there's two things, last things, you should know. There were bodies, they weren't living bodies they were, they were dead bodies that seemed connected via roots and they kind of keep an eye out still, like if, if they see you then other things on the roots seem to, to notice.

LYDIA

Ah.

ALEX

So, I managed, I managed to get in a little bit and, and ... they're not everywhere but we're gonna have to be a bit careful because, you know, I, I think it might be a little gestalty. I don't know maybe like a six out of 10, maybe like a three out of 10 gestalty. You know like ...

BEN

Right, yeah, yeah, that's, that scans, fine. Right, well, good to know. Well bad, bad to know, but ...

ALEX

They can't move, cause I am not quick. And they did not chase me. But I heard things, other things moving so then I left.

BEN

Right.

HELEN

Uh, like a big mushroom network with eyes, lovely, ok.

ALEX

Yeah.

HELEN

Good to ... yes.

BRYN

Oh, that's horrible. Thank you, that was both apt and terrifying.

HELEN

Yes, it's not good, is it. Let's, I assumed that we would be trying not to be seen by anything so, yes.

BEN

Speaking of, let's have a look at this equipment.

HELEN

Yes.

ALEX

And before we head into the armoury then why don't we take a break and I'll be back in a couple of minutes.

And welcome back. So, because we don't have Sasha in the party I'm not necessarily going to RP going through every single, you know, blade in detail because it doesn't have quite the same charm to it. What I would say is it's really well stocked. It's grossly over-stocked in fact. Augusta shows you round and it becomes very clear, very quickly, that most of it is either looted or some of it may have even been stolen prior. And maybe Ada and Tesla were naïve enough to assume that she was just really good at fetching things.

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In terms of what's in there though, straight out the gate if there's basically, any basic protection items, you know, amulets of natural armour that kind of thing they've got loads.

BRYN

But basically nothing that costs more than one or two thousand gold.

ALEX

That's the kind of thing we're looking at. They also have cloaks of elvenkind easily enough for everyone. Cat-burglar's boots if anyone's interested in them.

BRYN

What's the bonus on them?

ALEX

Plus 2 confidence bonus on acrobatics climb and stealth. And once per day as an immediate action you can re-roll any one failed check of acrobatics climb and stealth. It also has a hidden pocket to hide, masked work, these tools.

BRYN

So, in some ways they would fit Skraak except that, I assume that they would adapt to Kobold's feet but ...

ALEX

They're magic, so yes.

BRYN

... it might be better to give them to Azu to bolster a weakness rather than to enhance a strength.

ALEX

I think you might misunderstand me. There isn't one set of these boots.

(Laughter)

There's like eight, maybe nine.

LYDIA

Ah.

HELEN

Well then.

BRYN

So, anyone who doesn't already have boots can have them?

ALEX

It's not so much that they fell off the back of a lorry than that an entire freighter tipped itself over and Augusta helped herself.

HELEN

Tipped itself over, I see.

BRYN

Correct.

(Group laughter)

HELEN

I've seen how it is.

ALEX

There are also a number of goggles of the night.

LYDIA

Oh, I like those.

BRYN

Oh, yes, please.

ALEX

Not to be confused with night goggles, they're completely, completely different, these are goggles of the night.

LYDIA

I just want to highlight that, like we are being careful about slots and everything but like, I've been talking about Cel having goggles of intelligence but they are actually re-skinned, it's a kind of headband whatever the thing is. So, technically they can have both of these but like skinning wise definitely going for like full optician's level, like multiple things flopping down over the ...

(Laughter)

... eye socket.

ALEX

I'm imagining the ones from like that Hellboy film, I think it was Guillermo del Toro with the lenses ...

LYDIA

Yeah, yeah.

HELEN

We are going full steam punk goggle design here.

ALEX

Yeah, absolutely.

HELEN

Very, very good.

ALEX

And I'm afraid that is it apart from any mundane weapon you could possibly want.

HELEN

So, no cloaks of resistance.

ALEX

Oh no, I would count that as the basic resistance we was talking about.

LYDIA

Ok.

HELEN

Ok, cool.

BRYN

So, when you're talking about the basic items I always think of those as the set of cloak of resistance, amulet of natural armour and ring of protection. Those are like the three bread and butter ...

ALEX

Yeah, those are the ones I'm talking about ...

BRYN

... every day items. I naturally already spent lots of money on those ...

ALEX

So, this is your standard run of the mill plus one ring of protection that will deal with most of your bumps and scrapes.

So, yeah, Augusta's fine to equip all of you but is very keen to say that if you happen to come across anything particularly shiny on your travels do bring it back, you know, because it's our armoury.

HELEN

Are there any nice looking axes?

ALEX

Nothing comparable to what you're wielding.

HELEN

Azu, looks a bit smug about that.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

There is a very overwrought ceremonial axe but you know that that's not actually a weapon. It's more like maybe a trophy for a competition or something.

HELEN

It's for putting on a wall.

ALEX

Yeah, like ... and Augusta doesn't necessarily seem to know her mundane weapons that well.

BEN

Everyone knows if you put an axe on the wall in the first act by the third act you have to get it off the wall to use it in one fight before it breaks dramatically.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

The man's not wrong.

BRYN

I'll just pick up an amulet of natural element plus one because that's kind of the only slot.

ALEX

Yeah, you're pretty ... you have all of the numbers don't you. Your numbers are good. You have good numbers currently.

HELEN

Is this a cloak of resistance plus one, 500 ...

ALEX

Yes.

HELEN

... oh, ok.

ALEX

It's an armoury not a Christmas present, I'm afraid.

LYDIA

I want a Christmas tree.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

With that in mind does anyone have anything further otherwise I'm happy to basically, if you want to have a night's rest first and then go fresh-faced, bushy-eyed, bushy-tailed, bushy-eyed, yes, bushy-eyed ...

(Group laughter)

... in the morning that's fine, but it's up to you.

BEN

Never hurts to have full spell slots starting a dungeon crawl.

HELEN

Agreed.

ALEX

So, with that in mind then are we happy to skip to the next morning. Everyone fresh-faced and ready to teleport away?

BRYN

Yeah.

LYDIA

Yeah.

ALEX

In which case then Einstein is carrying a like hiker staff and he's wearing boots. He looks like he's about to lead maybe like a Scouts expedition or something ...

(Group laughter)

... and he's certainly talking with you all like that.

Ok, so, we are going to have to leave outside of this building before I can then teleport because of the wardings. When we arrive it is going to be dark, do not worry, it is fine, I have already scouted it out, ok. Now, could everybody please pick a body and make sure you stick with your body until the journey is complete, ok.

BEN

Yes.

ALEX

Good, right.

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Einstein just starts heading out the way you came in through that big elaborate airlock door and you're gonna have to go one at a time and blah, blah, blah.

HELEN

Sure.

LYDIA

Do, we have an awkward moment of Hamid and Zolf being near each other and so accidentally becoming each other's buddies and like then ...

(Laughter)

... I mean just for all the school playground AUs we need to know.

ALEX

Uh, no, I'll expressly need Azu because if something goes wrong with my legs I need someone who can pick me up.

LYDIA

Yeah.

HELEN

Yes, that makes sense.

BRYN

Fair point.

ALEX

I would say as well for clarity Skraak is coming as is Sumutnyerl as is Wilde. In which case then, heading outside everyone joining hands Einstein seems a little bit less jovial once he's outside in, you know, vague danger and sort of checking round and so on.

Ok, right so, last chance otherwise we're good to go?

HELEN

We all nod, quietly.

ALEX

Ok. All together then, three, two one ... and you teleport. And it's the first legitimate teleport you've had in a long time of game play. At no point do your feet accidentally come out of your head.

(Group laughter)

At no point do you feel like you're being stretched through infinity and forced to eat a thousand stars. You just turn up at your location.

LYDIA

Yay.

ALEX

And with that I would like to reveal to you and to the audience we are now going to be doing some stuff via role 20, an online system that can be both free

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and subscription paid because it allows me to do big elaborate battle maps.

With that in mind ...

LYDIA

Can I, can I be the one that tells the audience that what we've got loaded up that we can see is a big smiley face, just saying be afraid.

HELEN

Yeah, yeah.

ALEX

And the reason for this is very simple, it's because you should be afraid, yeah. We are going to be using role 20 as we explore Svalbard. So, if everyone could please get into role 20 if you're not already. Everyone there?

LYDIA

Yeah.

HELEN

Looking at the terrifying face.

ALEX

I am going to put you in to the new room. Do not freak out if all you see is black and last, but not least, I am doing things to do with fog of war, meaning you can't see the entire map all in one go. So, if that breaks let me know. This should now put you all into a new thing.

BRYN

Yeah.

ALEX

So, what you should be able to see is a big open area of earth ...

HELEN

Yeah.

ALEX

... and then what looks like a bridge leading out over a chasm. And you should also see two large, sort of, semicircles on either side.

LYDIA

Ok.

ALEX

You appear in what feels like an open-topped underground cavern. There is a large amount of unworked stone and earth around you and you are stood upon a large elaborate stone pavement with sort of interlacing designs upon it. Looking up, again, this is first impressions, the cavern is open to the sky above. It looks like it might be a naturally occurring light well or something similar that has been taken advantage of. You are at one end of a bridge leading over an enormous cavern, the bottom of which you cannot see. In terms of the scale of the bridge it is big, very big, far larger than that main entrance you were told about, for a scale of about five, 10, 15, 20 ... 35 ft wide, there you go. And it is 200(ish) feet long over the cavern. Highly impressively worked stone. It is

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leading to an enormous imposing fortress-esque edifice that is built into the very rock and ice. It has large amounts of arrow-slits, buttresses, things like that. This is a defensive structure built to defend from things on the outside getting in less than a prison to stop things getting out, if you see what I mean.

On either side of the main bridge you can see there are two balconies which are sort of a little bit higher than the bridge, maybe 10 ft or so that look out upon the bridge and the chasm which seem to be covered in medium size(ish) plants.

Could everyone please give me a quick perception check.

HELEN

Yes.

BRYN

24.

HELEN

17.

LYDIA

31.

BEN

11 and 18.

ALEX

Ok. I'll give extra detail for Cel, for everyone else using a sensible amount of deduction here it looks like the plants seem to have sprung from the fallen maybe. And they are marking where someone has fallen and been integrated into the system.

HELEN

Oh no.

ALEX

There is also Cel, for your benefit, on the left hand most balcony, these are all massive balconies by the way don't think little apartment, you're talking like a huge, almost like you could put market stalls on there, big square almost.

LYDIA

Yeah.

HELEN

It's about 75 ft across.

ALEX

There appears to be one actively shambling dwarven-sized creature, however, it does not look to be a dwarf, let's put it that way. Thus concludes your initial description.

LYDIA

Cel, excitedly while flipping the goggles of the night on and off as the additional lenses to the already pretty cool goggles describes all of this.

ALEX

So, Einstein obviously drops people off and goes ok so you see these two towers that's either side of us here, the little ones that overlooks the bridge, this is as far as I can go. Wait, now that's not true, I can go in because I have and it's, it's super scary but I can't teleport any further in than this.

LYDIA

How did you get in?

ALEX

I, I walked. You see ... you may not be able to see the main door up top, you see there is a square just beyond that it's a little dark, theirs is ... the main door is open, there's no portcullis or nothing.

HELEN

Ok.

BRYN

And the plants on those balconies are, are those the ones you said were looking?

ALEX

Ah, yeah, so these are the watchers. They aren't very good. They don't seem particularly bothered by sound which is interesting. So, you have to be quite loud ...

BEN

That's helpful.

ALEX

... and they, they can't see very far, you know maybe like 10 ft, something like that. The danger isn't that they're gonna see you coming it's more that, you know, you're gonna open a door and oh there's one, oh no, ah.

BEN

Right.

ALEX

That's what happened to me. I opened a cupboard, there was one, they all see, there we go.

BRYN

How many of them are there in that first, you know, room, or is it pretty clear?

ALEX

If you get in to the first hallway, you can't see it from here, the main entrance dead ahead is full of them. Loads and loads but there's a bunch of side doors,

I've tried the left-hand side and I've tried the right-hand side. The right-hand side seems a little clearer ...

BRYN

Right.

ALEX

... but there's not much in it really. All I would say is I think that if you can just get around that first sort of pile of them you're kind of in. This is, this is the front porch, it's a big front porch. His voice is a little bit echoey around the space.

LYDIA

Well, I, I can only make myself invisible. Or, or a bat.

BRYN

I, I can make us all invisible, a limited number of times obviously, but if there's a real collection of them near the front then we'll do that to get past, at least into the next section.

ALEX

Now, there is one last thing which is I can't go back then come here then go back again, I kind of have to stay, otherwise I'm going to use up all my teleports. So, I've got to stay here.

BRYN

Alright.

ALEX

So, he kind of looks a little bit sheepish and says mostly I solve my problems by teleporting away until they aren't there anymore.

HELEN

So, should some people stay with you?

ALEX

That's a really good suggestion that I didn't personally make, yes.

HELEN

(Laughter).

BRYN

Well the five of us have explored unknown and dangerous areas before and that's what we're good at. So, perhaps Oscar and Sumutnyerl you could stay with ... the two of you together would make a formidable team to hold the location.

ALEX

I think that's sensible. We can, we can hold this area and Sumutnyerl with your permission you're pretty good at like (makes a noise) ... at which point Sumutnyerl's ... yes, I, I can turn in to animals.

ALEX

I just mean that, you know, you could kill something with your bear hands.

BEN

Oh, dear.

HELEN

(Laughter)

BEN

Oscar, is this really the time for jokes?

LYDIA

I mean, I'm gonna say Cel doesn't respond to that pun but, but taps Oscar gently on the shoulder ... I do think you should know that what, what you said was actually very offensive in polar bear.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

Oh wow ...

LYDIA

That was, if that was intentional.

ALEX

That's genuinely really interesting.

BRYN

Shall we go.

ALEX

Yeah. Wilde turns round, on a serious note I'm going to sustain an illusion over us in probably the left side of this tower so that if anything comes they're just gonna see an empty tower anyway. So, if you come back and you're seeing an empty tower we might still be here, ok.

BRYN

Alright.

LYDIA

Do you have a message spell or anything like that, that would last long term so we could keep in contact and know if you actually disappear, is that a thing.

ALEX

The thing is that ... yes, I can but with all the warnings and stuff that Einstein mentioned the likelihood of it getting through ... the deeper in you are the more likely you are to be on your own.

LYDIA

That makes sense and we wouldn't want it to suddenly cut off and think that there was a thing that we need to rush back and help you with and then it would turn out that actually you were fine ...

BRYN

So, let's, fine, yes, so ... Cel, let's go.

LYDIA

Yep, yep.

ALEX

Right, in that case then good luck and, you've got this. I certainly couldn't think of anyone else in the world who is better suited.

BEN

Yeah, you too, be safe.

BRYN

Good luck.

BEN

Just before Wilde leaves, I just give him a squeeze on the arm.

LYDIA

Aww.

HELEN

Aww. Emotions.

ALEX

At which point Wilde, Einstein and Sumutnyerl all go into the left-hand tower and then, and this is where Alex really shows off his skills, the illusion of an empty tower is activated and they disappear.

LYDIA

Ah.

HELEN

Ohhhh.

ALEX

But as a GM I can still see them up to the ...

BEN

Up to the GM, I see.

ALEX

Yeah. Cause, cause they're on to a different GM plain.

LYDIA

Should we tell him that we were using this for the space game?

(Laughter)

BEN

Yeah.

HELEN

Go, ahead, it's cool.

BRYN

I would like to out of character quickly establish like literally a 30 second conversation between Hamid and Wilde to establish three code sentences that he could write in chalk to leave behind if they have to go that means slightly different things. I'm not clever enough to think of the codes or exactly the three most useful sentences, but that seems like a pretty simple practical three sentences, meaning three different codes.

HELEN

Oh, clever.

ALEX

Since we're, we're basically at the end of the episode. Why don't we call it there, you can discuss these off call, because we'll need something suitably elaborate and ridiculous. But in that then I leave you standing on the porch of an incredibly cold enormous chasm facing a forbidding ice fortress that is manned only by the dead and the doomed.

LYDIA

Ooh.

HELEN

Lovely.

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