

## **RQG – [193] – [Cult Classics]**

### **Content Warnings**

- Taunting & insults (inc. diminution).
- Continued threats of violence/death.
- Discussions of: pandemic & infection, cults, existential threat.
- Mentions of: death (inc. mass death) & murder, fire, innuendo, kidnapping.
- SFX: whispering & echoes.

### **[Show Theme - Intro]**

#### **ALEX**

Hello and welcome to episode 193 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.

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**LYDIA**

Lydia Nicholas.

**HELEN**

And Helen Gould.

**ALEX**

And who are you playing?

**BEN/ZOLF**

‘Not talking. Too busy sulking.’

**(Group laughter)**

**BRYN**

Hamid Saleh Haroun al Tahan.

**LYDIA**

Cel ‘Everybody’s okay, I’m sure’ Sidebottom.

**HELEN**

And worried Azu.

**(Group laughter)**

**ALEX**

I'm going to try a new format. I've been told, you know, by all of the players that what they really enjoy are, kind of mushy intros where we're not really playing the game or if we're chatting, so...

**(Helen laughs)**

... I thought I'd stretch it out a little bit, get a little bit weird with it! But, yeah! We are in...

**(Helen is still laughing)**

**BEN**

You are referring a conversation which the audience have not listened to!

**(Group laughter)**

That is a joke only for you!

**HELEN**

And which they will never listen to because it wasn't recorded!

**(Group laughter)**

**LYDIA**

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What do you think about the intros and the outros, folks? It would be nice if they were tighter. Cool, you know what? Instead of making it tighter...

**(Bryn laughs)**

... I will meta-reference this conversation!

**(Group laughter)**

Yeah! I just felt I needed to clarify to the audience what the heck was actually going on there!

**(Group laughter)**

***[Lydia sighs heavily]***

**ALEX**

So we are in Other London and a wild Barret has appeared who, although in my head because of the whole flanking cloaked figures, has a certain Diglett Dugtrio vibe going on!

**(Group laughter)**

So the evolved form of Barret, Barretrio, has turned up at the main gates.

**LYDIA**

Just, sort of, in front of Barret's fortress is just a grassy area that, if you walk through, there's random encounters...

**BRYN**

Barret [0:01:47] going Barreta, Barret, Barreta, Barret... da da da da da da...

**(Group laughter)**

**ALEX**

So yeah, a wild Barret has appeared at the main gates. So I'm going to go ahead and just start there, because I can! So, I believe Zolf was trying direct petulance towards the gate at that point?

**BEN**

It wasn't petulance, that was, like, a real look of abject hatred.

**ALEX**

Oh, okay, okay...

**BEN**

'Cos it's, you know, it's Barret!

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

Yeah, I'm going to be honest, it's not very effective but, nonetheless, Barret does use his little key to open the gates and step inside to the compound with his two flanking buddies who step in and then closes the gate behind him. He walks up, gives a very small, languid wave to Zolf, 'Morning.'

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**BEN/ZOLF**

‘If this is a trick, I’m going to make you suffer. Now, get out of my sight.’

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

Raises an eyebrow, ‘Are the rest inside?’ Turns to one of his compatriots...

**ALEX (as a Squizzard)**

‘Yesss...’

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

‘Right, fantastic. Thank you,’ and just pushes past Zolf.

**BEN/ZOLF**

‘Yeah?’

**ALEX**

The two flankers stay outside for a moment, sort of, look around and then one heads inside and the other one stays outside, stood facing out towards the gate. Not, like, all up in your grill, but close enough to be an annoyance.

**BEN/ZOLF**

‘Fair enough.’

**HELEN [laughing]**

Confide in the Squizzard!

**(Group laughter)**

They've heard worse!

**ALEX**

So, I am going to follow the inward-facing Squizzard and Barret unless I am told otherwise. As in, is Zolf going to be doing anything? You know, kind of, the way that you have a... you're poking at the animal going, like, 'dooooo something!'

**BEN**

No.

**ALEX**

Cool. So, following inside, then. I believe everyone's still in the main dining room last time I checked?

**HELEN**

Mmm hmm.

**LYDIA**

Yeah.

**BRYN**

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Yeah. I can't remember how the last episode ended. I remember all the juicy law and this huge list of questions, but apparently I didn't write them down.

**LYDIA [laughing]**

What?!

**BRYN**

I know!

**LYDIA**

Bryn, you're the one we rely on! I've got no clue!

**ALEX**

Fabulous!

**HELEN**

I think Wilde basically explained to us that Barret was about to come in...

**ALEX [almost crying with laughter]**

... the only episode you don't write stuff down!

**(Group laughter)**

**BRYN**

Yeah! Incredible!

**ALEX**

Where I laid everything out end to end!

**HELEN**

Well, you laid half the things out!

**BRYN**

I may well have written stuff down and misplaced the piece of paper I wrote it down on! That's also possible!

**ALEX**

No, I'm just waiting for it to be, like, 'So now that you've all been briefed.'  
'Yeah, we're fighting like some kind of banana, right? I dunno! Sounds about right!' Anyway, there is a duh, duh, da-duh, duh at the door...

*[rhythmic sound of knocking on door]*

... at the door to the dining room.

**LYDIA/CEL**

'Oh, somebody with a sense of rhythm is joining us! Do we have to let them in?'

**ALEX**

There's another bub, bub, ba-dub, bub...

***[further knocking sound]***

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Are we in control of who comes in here? I have to say, I haven’t felt in control for quite a while!’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Is that the approved secret knock, Wilde? Should we open the door? None of us know.’

**ALEX (also as Wilde)**

Wilde gives a weary, ‘That isn’t a secret knock, it’s just drama!’ Gives a knock-knock on the table himself and then the door opens.

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Hello all.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Does everyone in the world use the same secret knock? Like, I... it doesn’t seem efficient!’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Seems like a design flaw, doesn’t it?!’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Right?! Yeah!’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Hamid.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Look who it is...’

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

‘Oh, Azu – hello.’ Turns to Cel, ‘You’re Cel, yes?’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Yes.’

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

‘Hello. Lovely to meet you.’ Offers you his hand to shake.

**LYDIA/CEL**

Cel looks at Azu and Hamid and Wilde curiously as, having heard a lot of stuff about this person, they’ll be assuming this is Barret, just wants to check how they should... ‘Do I...?’

**ALEX**

Wilde just gives a, sort of, ‘Nnngghhh!’

**HELEN**

Azu crosses her arms and has, like, a very un-Azu-like look of hatred on her face, and gives, like, a little shake of the head, like, ‘don’t bless him with your hand’.

**(Group laughter)**

**LYDIA/CEL**

Cel will have begun to reach for the hand out, is genuinely looking at Azu and Hamid and Wilde for confirmation, sees that, like, the Wilde shrug... there’s some processing going on, and then just as their hand is about to perhaps touch Barret’s, snatches it back and folds their arms. ‘To meet... well... to meet you... Oh, okay. We’ve met.’

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

Barret turns to Wilde. ‘Right, so this is what we’re working with, then? Okay.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘This is what you’ve got. I assure you we are less happy about it that you are. Why don’t you lay out what it is you think we should be doing and we will decide whether to burn you both where you stand.’

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

‘Well, er...’ Barret sort of gestures to the cloaked figure, who stays outside the dining room and closes the door. Barret heads in and sits, sort of, closer

towards the Wilde end of the table than at the non-Wilde. I would be tempted to say, where was Zolf sitting?

**BEN**

Oh, it was two weeks ago, I can't remember!

**ALEX**

I am going to say that Zolf was sitting towards the Wilde end and Barret takes Zolf's...

**BEN**

Oh no, yeah, no. Sorry! He'll be sitting next to Wilde, yeah, of course.

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

Barret takes Zolf's vacated seat and sits and, kind of, pops a couple of things in his mouth to eat and then sits back. 'So, I'm guessing that Wilde, you've done your thing, yes?' Wilde just gives another, *[sighs]*. 'So I'm here to make sure if everyone's going to be playing with us, we all play nice, and to discuss next steps, so, I suppose the first thing is are we going to be able to play nice? I know there's been a lot of... a lot of bad blood, but, you know, a lot of water under the bridge, too, and at the risk of mixing my metaphors, hopefully one's washed away the others.'

**BRYN/HAMID**

'No. They're very much not. Some things aren't forgivable, Barret.'

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘I mean, I’m not entirely sure where this animosity has come from, you know?’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Well, it’s mostly the repeated murder and kidnapping.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Yeah, but most of that didn’t really...’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Repeated kidnapping and murder? One of the two.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Oh, you can’t just [0:08:06] here. Oh, alright. Fine.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘You mistreated our friend. And us. But mostly her.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Ah, right.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘I see you’re working with the Cult of Hades again?’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Oh yeah, there’s that, too!’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘A far cry from the rejection you apparently suffered from them the last time we talked?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Well, you and I both know, Hamid, that if there’s one thing that we both share as a talent, it’s the ability to find more powerful friends than ourselves.’

*[someone breathes out heavily]*

**HELEN/AZU**

‘You should be very careful.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘I, uh... what? I mean, there’s so many ways you could insult me, Barret, but that one’s a bit strange, really!’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘I have personally seen Hamid fireball, like, I mean, if you can do a bigger fireball... more... do you know people that can do more powerful fireballs than that? ‘Cos I would like to meet them... possibly from a distance! Definitely from a distance.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘I mean, fireball’s not really the be all and end all. Anyway, I would like to cast a spell on you Barret, and if you want us to trust a single thing you have to say,

you won't resist it. We've got to have some way of checking you're telling the truth.'

**ALEX (as Barret)**

'You're going to tell me what the spell is, though. Are we talking some kind of Zone of Truth? Something similar?'

**BRYN/HAMID**

'I'm going to be able to hear your surface thoughts as you explain further.'

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

'Ohhhhh... Oh, yes, of course. Fine. Give me one moment.' Barret goes over, just opens the door and says, 'You'll want to rescind your protection temporarily.' The cloaked creature just gives a bit of a cocked head. 'It's fine, it's fine. I'll come and knock when it's done.' He closes the door and goes back to his seat. 'Go on then, do your thing.'

**BRYN**

I cast Detect Thoughts.

**ALEX**

I don't know if you can choose to automatically fail.

**BRYN**

Any spell that gives a Will Save you can choose to forego the Will Save in general.

**ALEX**

In which case, then, you start hearing surface thoughts, the first one being something akin to, [*singing: doo, do-do, doo, do-do-do...*]...

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘So, tell us what happened to you after we left you in a cell in Damascus.’

**ALEX**

I would say, unless I’m saying, sort of, explicitly this is a thought, you can mostly assume that the Detect Thought, until I say otherwise, is a more sarcastic and weary version of the actual spoken word.

**BRYN**

Yeah, I’m using it because I want to know about outright lies.

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

Yeah. No, that’s fine – I understand as much. Expect, basically, if I am to say, like, ‘one, two, three, four’, it’s going to be more like [*in a whiny sarky voice: ‘meh, meh, meh, nyah, nyeh...!’*]

**(Helen laughs)**

But yeah, in terms of the actual speech, it’s closer to ‘erm, where do you want me to carry from, er... last time Grizzop saw me or the last time you saw me?’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘The last time we saw you, since Grizzop isn’t here.’

**ALEX (as )**

‘So that would be, gosh, that would be way back at the manufacturing plant, right?’

**HELEN**

No, Azu went with Grizzop.

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘We put you in the cell in Damascus and Grizzop told us he saw you, he didn’t tell us much about it. He’s told us he left you back in the cell.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

Yes, yes, he took me out, threatened to kill me. It was a whole thing. Then brought me back as, you know, I get that a lot, and then, more or less, I ended up in the cell. From that point, I’ll admit, it was a slightly boring period. A lot of time to think. There was a failed attempt to rescue me by my own people. Frankly, they’d have done better to just leave it be. They weren’t blessed with initiative, let’s say! Then, obviously, everything started going to hell in a handbasket, and once Damascus started to have it’s own unrest, it was a rather beneficial meeting where my friends outside paid a visit and it turned out that, er, my talents, shall we say, had a certain value regardless of whether they were underworld-focussed or other more... hmmm... organised-religion-

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bent. Long story short, they relieved me of my purgatory in exchange for my assistance in the, pardon the pun, Pandora's Box that they had opened.'

**ALEX (also as Wilde)**

Wilde just gives a wince at the 'pardon the pun' as just, like, 'Ugh, amateur, God!'

**LYDIA**

Cel's face is just as confused as mine because I cannot work out what the pun is! What's the pun? Like, wasn't it... ? Who' Pandora? This is not me asking in character! Just a confused face!

**ALEX (also as Barret's thoughts)**

No, I know, I know, I know! Reacting in character, there's a moment where Barret... you hear the surface thought of, '*Oh, really? God, what's the point of a classical study if you don't...*' that isn't articulated...

**BRYN**

Sure.

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

... and then Barret's just like, 'It doesn't matter, don't fret yourself.'

**HELEN/AZU**

'So then what? That's not the end of the story?'

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘That was all quite, quite vague.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Yes.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Specifically, what were you brought out to do? Really, I would like specific words. Those would be helpful right now.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Ahh, right. The infection began with Other London. I have an unparalleled knowledge of this area and the people within it, including those who had managed to survive, combined with, I have a certain technical ability and, certainly, mathematical acumen that has been particularly useful in effectively generating what might very well be the solution to this extra planar problem. Better?’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Good.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘What’s the solution?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘So the solution is one where I genuinely can’t tell you here. What I can do, though, is bring you all to where the solution is and show you that solution.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Uhhhhh... this person has a history of kidnapping, am I correct? ‘Cos that sounds like a...’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Yes.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘... another location, and I...’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘How about we all pretend that we’re at the correct location and you just say what you would say there, and then we can decide whether we will go to it with you?’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘You can describe the thing.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘No I can’t. This isn’t as safe as there. If the information was to get out, all is lost. I can tell you that there is a solution. I’m not going to tell you where it is

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until we got there. I'm not going to tell you what it is until you're afforded its protections.'

**HELEN/AZU**

'Right.'

**ALEX (as Barret)**

'I'm here as a guide, I'm not here as a best friend.'

**BRYN/HAMID**

'Ha!'

**HELEN/AZU**

'Good. You'll always be a man on the floor.'

**BRYN/HAMID**

'You don't have friends, Barret.'

**ALEX**

Oh, I'll give you a Detect Thought on that one! You'll always be a man on the floor, he bloody *hated!*

**BRYN**

Outstanding!

**ALEX**

HATED that!

**(Group laughter)**

Not a flicker across the face, not a word, but Detect Thought has... he hates that with a burning passion of a thousand suns. Hates it!

**(Group laughter)**

**HELEN**

Yes!! We'll avenge you, Sasha!

**LYDIA**

That was some excellent work!

**ALEX**

Excellent work!

**BRYN/HAMID**

Very good! 'Well, if you want to establish a level of trust, and there's this bit you can't tell us, then you'd better get your masters to tell us exactly what else was going on the whole time they were working against us, since you probably don't know. You're just a tool to them, Barret. You do know that. And I know you pride yourself on being a useful tool...'

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘The thing about being a tool is that if it’s a very good tool, eventually you can’t live without it.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Except when they tied you up and threw you to us.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘I didn’t say I was a useful tool then! Anyway... but cases aside, what I can do is tell you what role we’re hoping you might be able to fill in this regard, which should start giving you a little bit of a hint and, if nothing else, I should be able to answer any of your questions regarding the Cult. If it’s too high-level the answer might just be, no one knows. In terms of what they’ve been doing, they’ve been trying to clean up their own mess! When things first started to go sour, they did what they always do, which is they tried to take control of the damn thing, even though it was already out of control. They blew rather a lot of resources and certainly a lot of people on that folly, and then once they’d achieved their end of, basically, crippling their operations they took a bit of a side-step and conceded that they might actually have to help in the destruction of the thing. A lot of time, they were working opposed to the Harlequins, whilst the Harlequins were a de facto government, but obviously with the fall of the Harlequins, that particular obstacle has fallen for them. As far as I am aware, they are still very much of the opinion that it needs to be destroyed, not controlled. Certainly, the solution that’s on the table would not afford control. That I do know because I have helped with that.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘You misunderstand me, Barret. I could not care less about the misfortunes of the Cult, although, knowing what they’ve already attempted obviously would be useful information. What I mean is, they need to come clean about everything they have been doing specifically to us and to the places we visited before all this blew up in their faces, as well. If they want any level of trust, all of that needs to be made clear, too.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Ah, very well.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘How... how long has this been around? Like, this seems like a big plan and, I mean, you... meritocratic, kind of, maybe there’s always been these long-running plots, I don’t know if that’s a thing here, but it sounds like you were in hiding for a thousand years?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘You say you. You have to understand I’m a comparatively recent recruit. I’m not a die-hard devotee. Look, okay, the Cult of Hades... they were the defenders of Rome, okay? When they screwed up and then Rome fell...’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘I mean... they were the defenders of Rome? This is the story they tell, I assume?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Look, here you go... I wasn’t there. I also truly, from the bottom of my heart, and you know this with Detect Thoughts, don’t care and I know that you know that.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Proceed.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘... magical defenders of Rome, and when Rome fell they never gave up their task of ensuring the survival and flourishing, whatever you want to call it, of humanity as a species, let’s say...’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Hmm!’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘... which naturally goes a little bit at odds with the Meritocratic establishment.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Only humanity?’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘How?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘How what? Two questions at the same time. Put your hand up! Yes, Azu, in the corner.’

**BRYN**

I glare really hard.

**LYDIA/CEL**

Cel leans over to Hamid, *[whispers]* ‘I don’t like this guy.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Literally, no one does. Not a single person...’

**(Group laughter)**

‘... who has ever or will ever exist!’

**(Group still laughing)**

I say that loud enough for Barret to hear.

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘It’s quite unusual for me, it’s a new feeling.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘I prefer the word exceptional.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘It’s not applicable.’

**(Laughter)**

‘So what I mean is, you make it sound like the Meritocrats were trying to destroy humanity, which I don’t think is, I mean, I’m not human so I don’t know, but it does not seem to be the case. So what do you mean, the Cult of Hades is trying to advance humanity? Do you mean that the Cult of Hades was trying to make humans the rulers of earth or, like, what does that mean?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘I mean, I suppose, broadly speaking yes. It’s... look, there’s a lot of overlap with the Harlequins if I’m honest. The Harlequins believe in what, self-determination? Well, the Cult of Hades sort of believe the same thing, the only difference is they’re willing to make far, far more dubious deals to achieve that end. And they end up at the top of that pile, even better.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Self-determination for everyone and self-determination just for humans are actually very different things.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Indeed.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Ah, and there you go. That, right there, is the nub of the difference. You have to understand, my little friends outside, they're not actually ‘The Cult Of Hades’, they're just one of a long list of questionable allies they've made over the years.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Here’s a question then. Is there anyone at the Cult of Hades that we should know about, in terms of is there anybody that we already know who may have been working against us the whole time?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Ah, right.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Half the British aristocracy, it sounds like!’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Pretty much bang on, actually! I’ll be honest, they’re mostly dead, and one of the reasons that the Squizzards seem, that is what you’ve been calling them, right?’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘It’s a good name!’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Yes.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Yes. I like it! And the Squizzards have taken a bit of a shine to me as more and more of the Cult have disappeared, and I have become increasingly rare an attribute, who is someone who knows what the hell is going on. It’s affecting places other than here, basically. Other planes, other areas of the ether, whatever you want to call it, I don’t know.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Other planes?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Sure, that.’

**HELEN**

Can I... ? I know this never goes well for me...

**(Laughter)**

... but...

**ALEX**

Sneak up on him!!

**(Group laughter)**

**HELEN**

... can I roll a Knowledge Religion to figure out how big of a problem it is that the infection is apparently in lots of different planes?

**ALEX**

I'd allow a Knowledge Religion, but you'll need to roll decently. Knowledge Planes would be the most useful one here.

**HELEN**

Well...

**[Rolls dice]**

... Oh, that's only a 16.

**ALEX**

Probably bad.

**(Helen laughs)**

You're pretty... again, you never really paid attention at secondary school – we've established this before!

**HELEN**

Yeah, yeah.

**ALEX**

You heard that, you know, the mind and the body must be developed together and you heard, *'develop the body – I am on it!'*

**(Group laughter)**

*'I'll deal with mind later!'* and then the world went to hell! You're pretty certain that, like, you know, heaven has been described as a plane before, and things like that, but plane's a pretty broad term. Certainly, it probably has existential ramifications.

**HELEN**

Oh dear.

**BRYN/HAMID**

'Okay, so. Other questions. How were the Cult involved, and what happened with Kafka in Prague?'

**ALEX (as Barret)**

'Ha! That one is a funny story. They just cocked it up again!'

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Yes, obviously. I would like to know more specifically what were they trying to do and in what way did it go wrong?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘They weren’t trying to do much. The thing is, is Kafka was an absolute die-hard Hades man, don’t get me wrong. He also went completely off piste as a lot of the Hades lot are wont to do. You have to remember, the Simulacrum was one of about 40 different schemes they had cooking and boiling, it’s just the only one that sort of really got off the ground, only it kind of *really* got off the ground! Kafka just went mad with power. He was afforded the resources and the abilities of the Cult of Hades, but he went very old-school and, frankly, wasn’t especially useful. From what I understand his connection with the Simulacrum is more or less what you’d expect. He was tangentially related at best.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘What was the Cult’s interest in the vault in the Bank of Cairo? Was it the Heart of Aphrodite?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Oh yes. Well, more than just that, er...’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘What else?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Well, there was some paperwork there, wasn’t there, that you were digging around for, right?’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Sure?’

**ALEX (as Barret and *Wilde*)**

‘Well, that was part of it, because you have to... I mean...’ Barret turns to Wilde, ‘What have you been telling them? Honestly, they have no idea what’s going on!’ And Wilde’s just there, like, real calm, just like, “*Cos no one knows because you’re being an arse.*’

**(Group laughter)**

‘Look, yes, they were interested in any further things that they could make use of. Certainly, the Heart was useful. Also, they were very happy, frankly, to just have the ability, you know, locks of hair and so on, to be able to track all of you because you were a problem by that point.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘In what way, exactly, was the Gate Spell in the centre of Rome corrupted? Where did it lead? What was the point of taking our family there, and what was the plan with that?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

'Ah, right. A tough one, then.'

And I'll take a break there...

**(Group laughter)**

... like up my thoughts...

**LYDIA**

While Alex goes and rewrites...

**ALEX**

... just let me go and rewrite my story-world. Be back in two minutes! Okay!

Bye, bye, bye-bye, bye!

**(Group laughter)**

And welcome back!

**LYDIA**

That was a really nice six-months, Alex, that we took off.

**ALEX**

Look, it's been a very difficult re-write! You know, quality work takes re-drafting in an improvised format!

**LYDIA**

Yeah!

**ALEX**

Bloody difficult!

**LYDIA**

That's really cool!

**ALEX**

So, Hamid, by which I mean Bryn, can you rephrase that question, by which I mean repeat it verbatim with no change whatsoever?

**BRYN**

No.

**(Laughter)**

Basically, the question was, Rome – what up with that?!

**(Helen laughs)**

**ALEX (as Barret)**

Yep! ‘Right, so the best that I can do is I can tell you what I was told. I know you won’t believe it, but I actually had, quite literally, zero to do with what was going on in Rome.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘I mean, if there’s someone who knows more... we should ask them? Cut out the middle man?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘I mean, all the Cult of Hades really is at this point is middle man.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Explains why it’s the worst!’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘That doesn’t make sense.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Who is in charge?’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Yeah! You can’t have a middle person without a top person.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Well, the thing about being a middle manager is that if every single person above you starts to disappear, you sort of end up in charge.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Are you trying to tell us that you are in charge, because the way that you’re skirting around stuff, it doesn’t sound like you actually know as much as you’re trying to let on? So, is there somebody that actually knows, or is this all a kind of chaos in which no one has as much control as anyone thinks.’

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

Hamid, you have a Detect Thought thing that he doesn’t say and doesn’t pass across which basically boils down to, rather cruelly, looking at Cel, *‘Oh, god, it’s Sasha but with a spine’*.

***[Helen gasps, enraged]***

Not a word said, but you will detect that thought. ‘Yes, okay, look... here’s the situation. The Cult of Hades was defined by its allegiances, right? More and more of the actual Cult have been dying off left, right and centre...’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Well, no! I mean, it’s literally called the Cult of Hades. One therefore rather assumes that they worship the god, Hades, and functions more or less similarly to the other religions? And therefore there is a High Priest? I mean, if you’re going to go by, you know, that kind of principle, you wouldn’t make that assumption.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Look, they’re all mostly dead. I don’t know what you want me to tell you...  
Not, like, in a let’s go have a chat – dead – like the Cult of Hades can often do,  
but just, like, dead-dead.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Right. okay...’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘I can give you the answers that you want, but if you want ‘who is in charge’  
the reason I am sat here right now is because there’s a lot of debate as to that,  
and if there’s one thing I’m good at, it’s taking advantage of a power vacuum.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Indeed. Well, proceed then.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Do you pray to Hades?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘I don’t pray at all, god!’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘So, how does Hades feel about this?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Oh, who cares?!’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘So all of this is just some kind of fake scam? You’re just a power-seeking scam with no ideals? I mean, are you the Tories?!’

**HELEN [laughing]**

Cult of Hades multi-level marketing scheme!

**ALEX**

Helen gets it!!

**(Laughter)**

**HELEN**

It’s a pyramid scheme!

**(Group laughter)**

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Look...’

**HELEN [laughing]**

I’m sorry I interrupted you!

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Look, there are, out there, a number of, you know, true Hades who will rule Hades’ lot. I’m not one of them, I just happen to be very high up in an organisation that happens to really dig a specific god, okay?’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘So you don’t get any powers from him or her or them?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Me? Oh no, no, no, no.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘And they’re fine with you, just...?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘I don’t think you were listening earlier. The Cult of Hades have one defining attribute, okay, which I respect. They are many things, but one thing they are is very utilitarian. Okay? I am useful, therefore, I am, not even beyond tolerated – I am accepted. If I was not useful and was not going to serve their ends, I wouldn't be there. You are all here right now, after your little jaunt through whatever the hell you were doing to get here, because you are useful.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Given there’s no one better, why don’t *you* tell us what *you* know about Rome?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

'I keep trying, and I can't seem to fit a word in edgeways.'

**HELEN**

Azu visibly counts down from ten.

**(Group laughter)**

**ALEX**

Speaking of which, I'm going to jump to Zolf for a second.

**BEN**

Mmm hmm?

**ALEX**

So, you're there on the steps with a Squizzard, sort of, stood doing the Squizzard equivalent of lighting a smoke whilst on guard, which mostly consists of sitting there going, well, standing there, going [***makes Squizzard noise***]. Eventually, you see the hood, sort of, just turn to consider you.

**BEN**

I'm, sort of, sitting, like, kneeling on the steps. You know, propped on the glaive. I just make it go on fire as a response to that.

**ALEX**

At which point, yeah, could you give me a Will Save, please?

**BEN**

What kind of effect is this?

**ALEX**

It is a mind-affecting divination spell or similar.

**BEN**

So it's not emotion, it's not fear?

**ALEX**

Nope.

**BEN**

20.

**ALEX**

20. Yeah, it's still enough. You know that it's trying...

**BEN**

Huh, I rolled a three!

**[Ooof!]**

**ALEX**

... Yeah, like, you almost have to get a one for this to not work on them. You get the distinct impression it's trying to muck around with your head a little bit.

***[Ben breathes in deeply and exhales]***

You then receive a telepathic message that goes something along the lines of, 'Fair play!' ...

**(Group laughter)**

... and then it takes a side step and just stops looking at you and starts looking out the gate again.

**BEN/ZOLF**

'Do that again and I'll kill you.'

**ALEX (also as the Squizzard)**

'Understood.' I'm going to jump back into the room now.

**LYDIA**

Nice!

**BRYN**

Yep.

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

I do enjoy our conversations, Ben!

**(Group laughter)**

Will Save. I succeed. Excellent! I'll go to the rest of the group.

**[Group laughter]**

Yeah, so back to Barret. 'So, Rome in a nutshell. Again, this is, sort of, third-hand information, but as far as I understand the Meritocrats were used as some kind of tool to, you know, defend Rome, I guess, against all of their enemies. I don't really care. The important thing is that the Cult of Hades also were doing a similar role and when everything went a bit south and the Meritocrats were released, the Cult of Hades tried a last ditch attempt, I guess, to keep Rome going, that went rather south. As far as I'm aware, that gate, was it you called it? The portal thing where they dumped all of your friends...'

**BRYN/HAMID**

'It's a specific spell, yes.'

**ALEX (as Barret)**

'Yes, as far as I'm aware that probably leads if not directly to Hades then certainly to his front porch.'

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘It seemed that way.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘In terms of why they took your friends, it’s really simple. You were just interfering with the Simulacrum stuff. The mess around in Damascus was the final straw and they wanted a way to either make you more pliant which, obviously, if they’d have listened to me I would have advised that might have the opposite effect, but it had a beneficial side effect for them then, which was in your rescue and it took you out of the picture long enough for them to pursue their own ends. Unfortunately, those ends were bloody stupid and here we are!’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘So it was a distraction.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Wrong place, wrong time for you. I’m sorry. They made use of what is effectively a natural disaster in the centre of Rome by virtue of an even earlier version of their folly to keep you away from their current folly of choice.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘When we arrived there, there were four members of the Cult performing some sort of ritual around the gate. Sasha mentioned it.’

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

‘News to me. I’d have to ask.’ Detect Thought is a lot less interested and a lot more... in fact, I might even give you the wording... *‘Ooh, oohhhh, okay. Noted.’*  
... is effectively the mental conversation going on there.

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Well, perhaps we should invite your friend in here now and ask right now?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Oh, they won’t give you an answer.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘I’d like, at least, to ask them because you are not, like, you’re enjoying not giving us answers a bit too much, and I would just like to hear nothing from someone who’s having less fun.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘They’re not in charge. They’re foot soldiers with calamari for a face.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Do they know you talk about them like that?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Yes, but I’m useful. Do I really have need to keep repeating myself like this? Look, we have a place to go, alright? When we go to that place there will be

proper answers. I am not here to give you all the answers in the world, I am basically here to a) get you there, and...'

**BRYN/HAMID**

'No, Barret...'

**ALEX (as Barret)**

'What?'

**BRYN/HAMID**

'... you don't understand. You are here to give us every answer we ask from you because otherwise we will not trust you enough to help you with your plan and, in fact, our response, rather than helping you with your plan, will probably be to kill you. That is the situation.'

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

Barret looks you dead in the eye and, 'Do feel free to detect this thought, Hamid – if I die, everyone dies.' He fundamentally believes that.

**HELEN/AZU**

'Okay. How about I just chop something off you might miss?'

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

Detect Thought equivalent of, '... Ah...'

**(Group laughter)**

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘There’s one other flaw in your scheme. I believe that you believe that, but I don’t trust you enough to have any faith, even in your belief. So the fact that you seem to think you’re somehow crucial does not give me any reason to keep you alive if I can’t trust anything you say or do.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Therefore...’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘You cannot hold a threat over the entire world if there’s no understanding of what the threat is...’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Oh, right, right, right...’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘... and since you can’t explain your magic method to fix everything... You don’t have a threat. All you have is an empty promise and this is why you must give us everything you can possibly do. You seem to think that you have some sort of power here. You do not. Once again, you are a man on the floor, but this time you, perhaps, have the chance to be a useful tool for a little while longer, and you should be begging to be a tool, Barret, rather than a man on the floor. Do not think you are in charge here. Do not think you have the power here. This is you begging for your life. Do I make myself clear?’ Hamid’s hands are steaming.

**ALEX (as Barret)**

Barret turns to Wilde and is, like, ‘Do you really have such little control over your...’ puts up the, sort of, bunny ears, “team”?’

**LYDIA/CEL**

Cel gets up and says, ‘I... I do not want to be part of any plan that gives this man more power!’ and walks out.

**ALEX (also as Wilde and Barret)**

Wilde leans back and, effectively, with complete acknowledgement of that, and he’s just leaning and turns to Barret and goes, ‘The only thing I'd have said different to Hamid is that I'd probably been, you know, a bit more cruel. You're not so much a man on the floor as a petty little dictator with a, er, a sort of kink for obfuscation.’

**(Group laughter)**

So, frustrated, Barret turns back to Hamid. *‘Fine. What? What is it that you want? Ask the questions, I’ll give you the answers.’*

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Well, since you don’t seem to know what really was going on in Rome, I was saying that you should perhaps help us ask your friend. This is my point, Barret. You should be being as helpful as possible to us rather than sitting there feeling comfortable in your position.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Fine, fine.’ He goes over, knocks on the door. Hears a *[sound of door opening]*, and a Squizzardy friend comes in. ‘Ask away.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘What exactly was happening round the gate spell in Rome? What was the Cult of Hades’ intention with that spell?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

It looks to Barret. Looks back to you. ‘I’ll save you some time, Hamid. Erm, you might want to give them the whole, errr, you know, we hate you, we’d rather let the world burn than act without your answers – that kind of thing – otherwise they’re just going to do that. It’s sort of their thing.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Okay. Let’s see how clear I can be. We hate you.’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

You receive a telepathic message, *‘Ignore the small man, his answers are, at best, petty.’*

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘I agree.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Oi, don’t do that!’

**BRYN**

I smile at Barret.

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘I know you can speak – less of that please.’

**(Laughter)**

**BRYN**

And remember my Detect Thought is still active on Barret.

**ALEX (also as the Squizzard)**

Yeah, he’s not happy, he knows how to recognise when a telepathic conversation is happening that he’s not privy to. It sort of considers him for a moment and then it starts speaking instead of telepathically communicating, ‘The portal would close if it were not maintained. That would not benefit us.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Why do you maintain it?’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

‘Cos we enjoy our presence in this world.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Oh, so it is there so that you and the rest of you... Would you disappear if it closed?’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

‘It would make life harder. That is not an anchor for an entire existence, but it’s a start.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘A conduit for power.’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

‘Yes.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Are you aware of the time distortion?’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

‘Yes.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘And you use it to your advantage?’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

‘Yes.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Is Hades in there?’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

‘Yes.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Is this... is this his plan?’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

‘No. No, no, no. Hades is a very large, very tired shark. We are in its wake.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘What does Hades want?’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

It, sort of, looks at you, who knows. I’ll tell you what he wants. He wants what anyone wants, to sit on the pile and just be their head honcho. Hades out of all of them is the only one I get.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Hmmm. I think gods are more complicated than that.’

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

‘You would.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘So, hang on – does he not know, does he not know what you do?’

**ALEX**

Who’s that to?

**HELEN**

To the Squizzard. Azu has, like, turned her back on Barret as much as possible and is just talking to the Squizzard.

**ALEX (as the Squizzard)**

‘Does the storm care for the actions of a wave?’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Right.’ Azu does what I did and, like, leans back and thinks about metaphors and is trying to link it to Poseidon in some way, and, like, what she knows of Zolf’s back story.

**ALEX (also as the Squizzard)**

Another telepathic message happens to Hamid from the Squizzard, *‘The small man is here, because he does have some use. He does not speak for the Cult or for us. We allow him to think he does, because then he remains active, productive, and useful.’*

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Yes, that makes a lot of sense, sadly.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Enough of that, thank you!’

**BRYN/HAMID**

I roll my eyes at Barret. ‘Okay, now I believe the next thing you needed to tell us was everything you’ve done so far to try and take control of the organism at the centre of the blue-veins, the ways it failed, the things you’ve already done to try and destroy it, and the way those failed as well.’

**ALEX**

I’m assuming that’s to the Squizzard or is it to Barret?

**BRYN**

It’s to both of them in general.

**ALEX**

The Squizzard stays impassive so Barret steps up.

**BRYN**

Barret is more annoying, but Hamid, you know, hates both these people individually and together.

**ALEX (also as Barret)**

Barret pipes up, ‘A lot of it is, kind of, wibbly wobbly magic time, but erm...’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Yes, I understand wibbly wobbly magic. Explain it.’

**(Laughter)**

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘The first...’

**LYDIA**

I’ve got a *degree* in wibbly wobbly magic, I’ll have you know!

**(Group laughter)**

**BRYN**

I mean, I very much don’t have a degree, but...

**(Group laughter)**

**LYDIA**

Yeah, yeah!

**BRYN**

... I have all the knowledge that you would have from a degree anyway because of other magic!

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘... the original plan with the Simulacrum was far more mundane. It would obey what they told it. Job done.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Yes, I understood that bit.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘Once it started taking it’s own intentions, the first act was to infiltrate it. That went particularly poorly, didn’t it?’ The Squizzard remains impassive. ‘It’s almost like trying to infiltrate something whose entire modus operandi is taking control of anything it’s introduced to is a really stupid idea, mmm?!’ He turns to the Squizzard. The Squizzard remains impassive. ‘After that, naturally, they attempted to bring it down using their own means. As far as I’m aware, that consisted of, you know, magic spell, all that kind of thing, though our friends here do seem to have a desire to do so from their own home plane of existence, whatever you want to call it, with little use. Their last and ultimate failure attempt was some kind of attempt to maybe work with and/or manipulate the Harlequins – just win it in an outright war. You saw how that went! Broadly speaking, that’s it.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘So nothing very clever or creative? So congratulations, Barret. Finally, time to be a nice big tool!’

**(Group laughter)**

‘Your turn! What is it you’ve worked out? And if you need to take us somewhere, I suppose we have to go there.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘There is a way to kill it. It is a combination of the magical and the mundane. It turns out that I’m, for all of my actions, somewhat adept at the mundane, less so of the magic, but that’s not, you know, my forte – that’s fine. The important thing here is that a combination of the two, we believe, would work, but it requires two things. One, an item fetching, because it’s almost like when you get a bunch of people together who are very good at thinking, very often they’re not very good at punching, shall we say? So we need someone who can punch their way through to a missing piece, and then punch their way through up to where this thing can be used.’

**HELEN/AZU**

‘Okay.’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘And, unfortunately, we’ve run out of people who can punch, because it turns out our friends here, although they are, you know, tall and menacing and oh, so scary, they’re actually rather rubbish at doing anything useful against this thing. They can stay off its radar, certainly, but they’re not particularly fighty.’

**BRYN/HAMID**

‘Yes, yes, yes. What is the missing piece, and where exactly do you think it can be used?’

**ALEX (as Barret)**

‘And these, my friend, are questions that can only be answered at your next location.’ I’m going to cut to Cel stepping out beside Zolf to a creepy thing that’s very pointedly not looking at Zolf.

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘I see you’ve been making friends, Mr Smith!’

**BEN/ZOLF**

‘He tried to do something to my mind. If he does it again, I’ll kill him.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘Makes sense!’

**BEN/ZOLF**

‘How’s it going in there? Looks like you’ve met Barret.’

**LYDIA/CEL**

‘There's a plan that he wants us to be part of, and he seems altogether too happy about the plan. And any plan that makes that man happy, I worry would be just as bad for the world as whatever is happening right now... And I don't really want to be in the room where I could be convinced that it's a good plan, because I think that he's good at convincing people, but he's not good. So... I kind of... I... I think there needs to be some reflection on whatever it is he asks us to do, because... no offence...’ **[to the Squizzard]** ‘I, mean, really, kind of

offence, but I don't want these people in charge of reality, so I came here. I don't really know what to do.'

**BEN/ZOLF**

'Nope, that's why I'm out here.'

**ALEX**

At which point both of you, I won't require a Perception Check, hear approaching footsteps – one pair very small, one pair very large. And I think I'll end the episode there. That feels a sensible out! Right!

**LYDIA**

Giant feet! Boom, boom, boom!

**(Laughter)**

**BRYN**

I mean, it's Skraak and Sumutnyerl.

**ALEX**

Spoilers! You don't know that! You don't know that!

**HELEN**

Ohhhhh...

**BRYN**

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I mean, it definitely is!

**ALEX**

Okay, why don't you... shut the hell up...

**(Laughter)**

... and we'll come back next week!

**(Group laughter)**

**BRYN**

Shall we go to next week and meet those two again? Great! Okay!

**ALEX**

Bye, bye, bye, goddamnit!

**(Laughter)**

**BRYN**

See you next week, I guess!

**EVERYONE**

Bye!

**[Show Theme - Outro]**

**ALEX**

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**ALEX**

You're not so much a man on the floor as a petty little dictator with a, sort of, kink for obfuscation.

**(Lydia laughs)**

... Sorry, I wasn't expecting that big a reaction!

**(Lydia laughing hysterically)**

**BRYN**

I... I... Wow!

**(Lydia still laughing)**

**HELEN**

I mean, you did nail it, yeah!

**(Lydia crying with laughter)**

**ALEX**

Oh, I can't believe it – it's the rare and specific broken Lydia!

**LYDIA [laughing]**

It's Alex telling Alex he's got a kink for obfuscation!

**(Group laughter)**

I can't... I can't... !!