

RQG – [194] – [Full Circle]

Content Warnings

- Taunting & insults, scopophobia.
- Discussion of: death (inc. mass death), physical violence, cults, apocalypse & existential threat.
- Mentions of: bears, explosions, suicide, knives.
- SFX: continued ticking, clicking, bells.

[Show Theme - Intro]

ALEX

Hello and welcome to episode 194 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.

ALEX

And who are you plaaaaying?

BEN

Zolf Smiiiith.

BRYN

Hamid Saleh Haroun al Tahan.

LYDIA

Cel Sidebottooooooooooooooooooooooom.

HELEN [laughing]

What was that?! Cel Sidebottom on its side!

LYDIA

I just heard the Zolf long, and I just wanted to outdo, okay?! Just outdo!

(Group laughter)

HELEN

There's a portmanteau between Cel and slide there, I think...

LYDIA

Sliiiiide...

HELEN

... but anyway! And Azu.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

So, I believe that we were... well, I say I believe, I know categorically, I am sure of it! You are in Other London and a pair of large footsteps and a pair of small footsteps are approaching as you are all still within the Barret compound...

LYDIA

And it was a complete mystery who they were!

ALEX

Just... slowly just driving Barret into the ground while Zolf just sits.

BRYN

It couldn't happen to a nicer man!

(Group laughter)

ALEX

At which point, yes, I believe you heard a large pair of footsteps and a small pair of footsteps approaching and Bryn, *[pffft]*, assumed it was Sumutnyerl and Skraak, so as the things that used to be Sumutnyerl and Skraak...

(Group laughter)

... no, I'm going to jump in, basically, where we left off which is with those approaching. A Kobold and a bear may round the corner, that may or may not be exactly what you expected, fine!

(Helen laughs)

LYDIA/CEL

'Skraak! Sumutnyerl!'

ALEX

They, sort of, give a look around. Skraak gives a little bit of a wave and bear turns back into Sumutnyerl, and then they let themselves into the compound.

BRYN

Sorry, canonically it's the sound that druids make when they transform back into people, *[bleuuuuggggghhh]*!

(Group laughter)

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘Trust me, it is weirder out there.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Oh, really?’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘Oh, yeah – proper weird.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘I mean, it’s not a competition, but I’m going to say, it’s going to be hard for it to be weirder than it is in there!’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘When did you all get here then?’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Yes, I’ve been here for days now.’

BEN/ZOLF

‘About half an hour ago.’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘Oh, right, okay. Yeah, I knew there’d been some weirdness, but... so, is everyone here? Oh, hey, Zolf!’

BEN/ZOLF

‘Hey. Yeah, everyone’s here.’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘Right. So, why are we outside?’

LYDIA/CEL

‘That’s just... well... Zolf can answer for himself, I wouldn't want to step on those... their emotions... toes... toemotions...’

BEN/ZOLF

‘I’m just getting some fresh air.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Zolf is getting some fresh air. Er, I became convinced that the people that wanted us to work with them have thoroughly bad intents and I do not trust them enough to listen to them try to convince me that they are doing a good plan.’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘Oh, yeah... you’ve met the Barret guy, right?’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Yeah, so... it’s the sort of thing where you know someone might convince you with their logic and that’s not...’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘Not if we stab them first!’

LYDIA/CEL

‘That was genuinely a thing that I thought about. I don't know what it is about that guy that makes me think about knives?’

(Group laughter)

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘It's... I don't think it's a you thing, I think about knives with him as well.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘It's genuinely... you know, it's a strange thing. It's not really been an obsession of mine before, but yes, he's trying to tell us to do a thing and I just, I don't... I don't trust him enough to listen to it. It's like, I just, it's... these people... er... they're not really lovely people, but maybe you are **[pointing at the Squizzard]...**’

BEN/ZOLF

‘They ain't.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘So, I don't know... I mean, these are first impressions and I... **[addressing the Squizzard]**... I don't, I don't... I am always willing to revisit those, but it does seem that they are evil and committed to evil, and to taking over the world

and doing a lot of damage while doing so, so, you know, there's just a lot, practically, going on that I don't want to be involved in and I... I know that I... Sometimes I make bad decisions and sometimes it's good to step away from things before you have been convinced to do something. Because it seems very logical. I didn't feel it was a healthy or safe place to be. And also, I wanted to check if Zolf was okay with the air, thing, you know...'

ALEX (as Sumutnyerl)

'What is wrong with Zolf's air?'

LYDIA/CEL

'Uh... I... just...'

ALEX (as Sumutnyerl)

'Zolf, what is wrong with your air?'

BEN/ZOLF

'Nothing's wrong with my air. I was quite upset about something so I removed myself from the upsetting situation.'

ALEX (as Sumutnyerl)

'How very wise. I'm going to head inside.' Sumutnyerl gives a side-eye look towards the Squizzard. 'I'm finding not all of the company here to be amenable.'

BEN/ZOLF

‘Oh, there’s another one inside, so...’

ALEX (as Sumutnyerl)

‘I feel an inherent urge to no longer go inside.’ Sumutnyerl, sort of, just steps out a bit further into the yard.

LYDIA/CEL

‘Yeah, I felt that feeling as well.’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘I get the impression that it’s a bit of talking now and then we’re moving to wherever the next place is.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘But... but is... is that something that they want and is that the right thing to do? It seems like they’re saying there’s a solution, but what if they’re lying and this is a way that will actually leave them in charge and, again, you know, I don’t...’

BEN/ZOLF

‘Then we’ve lost.’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘Basically.’

BEN/ZOLF

‘Like, we’ve already lost, so, if they’re the best option... well, if they’re the only option, it’s that or nothing.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘There are other options?’

BEN/ZOLF

‘Maybe.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘I should have stayed inside to hear. Maybe I should get all the information... um, yes.’

BEN/ZOLF

‘I often find that doesn’t really help!’

LYDIA/CEL

‘You... oh...’

ALEX (also as Skraak)

Yeah, so Skraak knows there’s all kinds of stuff flying through the air right now.

‘I’m going to head inside.’

LYDIA/CEL

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‘Yeah, you know what, I will come with you, but er... to just... If I seem like I’m agreeing with something because it sounds like fun experiment, do kick me!’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘Okay.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Like, you know, if there’s explosions...’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘Do you think there’s a way of opening this door quicker than the normal method? Do you reckon there’s a way we could test that?!’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Wait, no...! I can see... you’re trying to get me to explode something, aren’t you?!’

ALEX (also as Skraak)

Skraak opens the door and starts heading inside. ‘I just thought I might try and trick you into an early kick, but it’s fine, it’s fine!’

LYDIA/CEL

‘I saw through you right there!’

(Laughter)

ALEX

I'm going to jump to the inside of the dining room as Cel and Skraak enter. Sumutnyerl stays outside 'cos Sumutnyerl does not like being near Squizzards. Into the dining room, where it was Barret and Hamid having a natter with Azu occasionally just putting the absolute smackdown in ways that Barret can't acknowledge...

BRYN

And Wilde and a Squizzard were also there.

ALEX

Of course. Oh yes, yes...

BRYN

And Wilde did also get in one epic smackdown.

ALEX (also as Barret)

That's true, that's true. So Barret's there as Cel and Skraak enter. 'Ah, hello.'

BRYN/HAMID

'Oh, Skraak! Oh, I'm so glad you're okay!'

ALEX (as Skraak)

'Hamid. Azu. Hello.'

BRYN

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Hamid will, sort of, move towards Skraak and then catch himself and hesitate a bit.

ALEX

Skraak holds out a hand to shake.

BRYN/HAMID

Hamid accepts, gratefully. 'Oh, I'm glad you're alright.'

ALEX (also as Skraak)

'Who's the big one?' Skraak points at Gragg, who has been in there very still and very quiet in the dining room the whole time.

HELEN

I completely forgot he was in there!

(Laughter)

ALEX

Yeah, people do that with Gragg!

(Group laughter)

HELEN

Aww!

BRYN/HAMID

‘Oh, this is Gragg. He’s a friend of ours from a long time ago, well, a friend of Sasha’s, actually.’

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘Hello. Hey.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘Er... also an excellent cook and, just, generally a great guy!’

HELEN/AZU

‘Yeah. New friend.’

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘Hello.’

HELEN

‘And good to see you!’

ALEX (also as Skraak)

‘Alright? So, have we decided what’s happening with this prick, then?’ He points to Barret.

(Helen laughs)

BRYN/HAMID

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‘Not, not yet. He still has some questions to answer.

HELEN/AZU

‘No...’

ALEX (also as Skraak)

‘Well, don’t mind me!’ Skraak just, sort of, goes over and settles in. Gragg puts a big hand up since people have been acknowledging Gragg’s existence again...

HELEN

... Oh god!!

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘Erm... So what’s a Squizzard?’

HELEN/AZU

‘Oh, oh, these people.’ Azu gestures as the Squizzard.

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘Oh. Right. Okay. And the Simulacrum?’

HELEN/AZU

‘It was a metal person that was going to take over the world and then did...’

BRYN/HAMID

‘A large, mechanical robot – have you ever seen one of the clockwork men, like they have in Paris?’

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘Oh yeah.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘Yeah. So like that, but a bit more bulky. More similar to another person...’

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘Right.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘... quite large, and the idea was that they could perform almost any task you gave them and they were going to be used as an army or something, but then...’

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘Oh, okay. But now they’re a big plant thing?’

BRYN/HAMID

‘Well, there was a sort of... one of the components that made the first Simulacrum work, yeah, it was, like, a seed and when it started growing it turns out it had consequences no one really understood.’

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘That makes sense if it’s a robot that’s full of seeds, it’s going to turn into a robot that’s a big plant. That makes sense, yeah.’

HELEN/AZU

‘Yeah, yeah! Basically! That’s my understanding.’

ALEX (also as Barret)

Barret’s just there, watching this back and forth. ‘Thrilling as this is, erm...’

BRYN/HAMID

‘Oh, shut up!’

ALEX (as Barret)

‘... what more do you need?’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Stick it... could you just stop pretending you’re in charge?!’

HELEN/AZU

‘He’s not. He’s not in charge.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘I’m still waiting on the answers to my latest questions, Barret. What is the thing that you need us to fetch, and how exactly do we use it, and what exactly do we use it on?’

ALEX (as Barret)

‘I’m still waiting on you to remember that I stated I cannot tell you those things in this place.’

[Hamid sighs heavily]

HELEN/AZU

‘I have another question, which is, is it a suicide mission?’

ALEX (also as Barret)

‘Probably not.’ With the Detect Thought still kicking around, I would say, *‘although I could think of worse fates for you all...’* or something similar.

BRYN

Hamid just raises and eyebrow.

HELEN/AZU

‘Right.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘I mean, it’s going to be very dangerous and whatever he pretends, I don’t think he really knows how dangerous it will be.’

HELEN/AZU

‘I just thought it would help to check that, you know, if it involves walking directly into a volcano or something. It would be good to know in advance!’

ALEX (as Barret)

‘Well, in a lot of ways, you’re already in the heart of the volcano if you think about it.’

HELEN/AZU

‘I don’t care what you think.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘Right. So, I think at this point it would be a good idea for the two of you to go and wait in the furthest room of this place while the rest of us talk without you.’

ALEX (also as Barret)

‘Very well, that’s fine. Don’t linger too long.’ And then Barret just stands up, heads out and leaves.

LYDIA/CEL

‘I’ll go and get Zolf and Sumutnyer!’

ALEX (also as Wilde)

Wilde just pipes up, ‘Thank you, Cel, if you would. I don’t think we can get any further without.’

LYDIA

Cel goes and does that.

ALEX (also as Wilde)

While Cel's gone, Wilde sort of gives a meaningful glance at Hamid, 'I may have heard you earlier. Is this going to be a problem?'

BRYN/HAMID

'What?'

ALEX (as Wilde)

'You might want to take a bit of time and figure out what's happening with you and Zolf.'

BRYN/HAMID

'Oh. Oh, that... yeah.'

ALEX (as Wilde)

'If he's going to duck out of every briefing, if nothing else, it's going to take twice as long.'

(Helen laughs quietly)

BRYN/HAMID

‘Was that because of what I said to him? I thought that was because of... the other thing?’

ALEX (as Wilde)

‘I think Zolf... I think I know Zolf well enough to know that, in Zolf, it all tends to get mixed up together.’

HELEN/AZU

‘Mmmm. You do know him better than any of us. Let’s sort out the immediate problem of how to save the world first, maybe, but Hamid...?’

BRYN/HAMID

‘I’ll do... I don’t have anything more to say to Zolf about what I was saying before. I don’t know...’

HELEN/AZU

‘That’s not what I mean... just...’

BRYN/HAMID

‘I’ll do my best not to antagonise him.’

HELEN/AZU

‘I don't think it's your fault... I want to... because, I think that, perhaps, you two simply may not be able to be proper friends like we are? I don’t know what you think.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘I think... I guess I think you might be right, Azu, but it’s not important right now. Let’s work out what we’re doing next, but... I think it’s going to be okay.’

HELEN/AZU

‘Alright.’

ALEX (as)

‘Understood. I’m not trying to force an issue here, I just need to know if we’re going to have to address that immediately or not.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘I hope not. Not for my part.’

ALEX (also as Wilde)

‘Okay. Understood.’ In which case, then, I’m going to jump to Cel popping outside and fetching Zolf and Sumutnyerl.

[sound of creaking door]

LYDIA/CEL

Cel comes out the door. ‘So, the Squizzards have left and so we’re all having a lovely briefing about what we’re gonna do, and you should be there because it’s awful! They say it’s not going to be a suicide mission, so hurray...!’

(Bryn and Helen laugh)

‘... we trust that!

ALEX

Sumutnyerl doesn't say anything further and just heads inside.

LYDIA/CEL

‘Yeah! You alright, Buddy?’ to Zolf.

BEN/ZOLF [exhaling deeply]

‘That's a big question.’ And I'll head inside.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

Yes, good! Good! Excellent.

BRYN

I have a, kind of, knowledge question, Alex.

ALEX

Yes.

BRYN

I still have Detect Thoughts active on Barret and to Bryn it feels very much like Barret is, like, no I can't tell you this yet because he doesn't want to lose his

remaining leverage, whereas one of the points of Hamid was if there is, like, a genuine justification for I can't tell you this yet beyond just saving his own skin, then Hamid will kind of go along with it more readily than if... ?

ALEX

I will spell it out for you because you'd know from Detect Thoughts...

BRYN

Yeah.

ALEX

He genuinely believes he cannot actually tell you more here because this is a forward-operating base, it's not an HQ.

BRYN

If it's not safe or whatever, sure, okay.

ALEX

However, he is absolutely relishing the fact...

BRYN

Yeah, of course!

ALEX

... that he has managed to get himself in a situation where he can sit there and act like the big I am again...

HELEN [roaring with anger]

I hate him so much!

ALEX

... and not telling you something is his greatest joy in this conversation, but you genuinely believe that he believes telling you this here would be a tactical error. Like, that's obvious from surface thoughts.

BRYN

Yeah.

ALEX

Unless the guy is an absolute, like, dual-mind master, blah, blah, blah, blah, but then we're heading into, well then, why bother at all? You know?!

BRYN

Yeah. Thank you.

ALEX

Can I assume that everyone is reconvening in the dining room then?

ALL

Mmm hmm.

ALEX (also as Wilde)

In which case, then, with everyone back and sat, Wilde's just, like, 'So, we've got a choice.'

BRYN/HAMID

'So Barret thinks there's some sort of item which, if we go and retrieve it, we can then take it to another location and use it, and it will have some sort of huge impact on the hive at the centre of the hive-mind.'

LYDIA/CEL [talking over Hamid]

'Will it kill everyone who is, like, do we know if it will kill people or free them?'

BRYN/HAMID

'We don't.'

HELEN/AZU

'No. He says that he can only tell us the specifics once we're in a safer place that, you know...'

BRYN/HAMID

'And he genuinely thinks that, as much as he's enjoying leveraging his position, there is something genuine there, too. I mean, I think the questions we have to ask are, and maybe we don't know enough to answer these yet, is both Barret and the Cult of Hades want to rule as much of the world as they possibly can and, right now, the biggest thing in their way is the blue veins, which still feels like an inaccurate term with what we now know, but the point is, I kind of believe they're genuine in their desire to get rid of that, but obviously, if they

had found a way to somehow take control of it, they're going to do that rather than destroy it. So the question is, do we, as we're going through, do we think that what they are suggesting that we do is going to actually destroy the problem? Is it going to kill everyone in the process? Is it going to somehow give them control of it? But also, if the action we take, you know, leaves them more powerful or gives them the opportunity to suddenly take control of so much all at once, are we just replacing one type of terrible with a different type of terrible?'

ALEX (also as Wilde)

'I think...'

This is Wilde. '... I think that, to my eye, one, we can follow him to wherever this magical safe location is and then make the call.'

BRYN

Hamid is nodding.

ALEX (as Wilde)

'Two, unless anyone has anything I don't know about, to my eye it's a case of assuming this isn't just openly a ploy to gain control and kill everyone in the process. [*Sighs*] Am I wrong in my assessment that it seems to me that we just have to cross each bridge when we come to it? You know, save the world from one thing and then set up for the next?'

BRYN/HAMID

'I think you might be right, Oscar. I think the good news is that, probably, the people in this room are best placed to assess the impact of whatever Barret is having us do with... Cel's our chemical knowledge, and Sumutnyerl's botanical

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knowledge, and, you know, the magic we, kind of, a lot of us know about a bit... hopefully we can, at least, figure out before we take any action what impact it might have?’

HELEN/AZU

‘And, you know, if they try and take over the world, we can just kill them!’

LYDIA/CEL [laughing]

‘Azu, I like you, and I like the way you think. I don’t say that enough! I just... I just...’

(Helen laughs)

‘... yes!!’

ALEX (as Wilde)

‘They’ve managed to fail to take over the world for millennia. Presuming that they don’t manage to leverage this situation successfully, I suspect they could continue to fail for another millennia.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘They don’t seem very good at it!’

BRYN/HAMID

‘If indeed, if what we’re doing doesn’t directly, you know, help them accumulate more power immediately, then, yes, it may be that they’ll be the next enemy to fight, but we’ve got to face the biggest threat first, I suppose.’

ALEX (also as Gragg)

Gragg awkwardly puts a hand up. ‘Hmm, I know that there’s more people than Barret up top. He’s not, like, all of it.’

HELEN/AZU

‘Oh!’

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘He’s more like a messenger boy.’

HELEN/AZU

‘Gragg, who do you know about?’

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘I dunno who they are, but I overhear, you know, conversations and that.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘Oh, I didn’t necessarily mean Barret specifically, although he clearly needs to be dealt with. I meant the Cult in a more general sense. I think they are...’

HELEN/AZU

‘Oh yeah...’

BRYN/HAMID

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‘... obviously a bit more powerful than what we see right here directly in front of us, but not as powerful or as threatening or as deadly in the immediate sense as the infection.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Gragg, do you think that they’re telling the truth?’

ALEX (as Gragg)

‘Before Barret made contact, it was pretty rough down here. Um, I mean, it’s not Easy Street – when has Other London been Easy Street? But, I mean, if it was, we’d call it Easy Street and we didn’t, so it can’t have been!’

(Helen laughs)

‘But we get supplies now, [0:20:50] with a couple of other, you know, people who have made it through and, that’s a lot of effort to go to if you just want to kill everyone anyway!’

HELEN/AZU

‘Mmmm.’

ALEX

He gives a, sort of, enormous shrug.

LYDIA/CEL

‘To me, it doesn’t seem like there’s much of a choice about what we do now, right? I... you know, we can leave the world as it is or not, and I’m very much in the not, but I just want to make sure that we stay alert at every stage to the idea that they might be, firstly lying to us, secondly hiding another option? This could all be something to distract us from the fact that there is another way to get rid of it all, and so managing to make us work on this rather than realise that there’s a way to get rid of all of them altogether, and...’

BRYN/HAMID

‘That’s a really good point, Cel. I don’t think I could have put it better, and, actually, Sumutnyerl, we haven’t had a chance to talk with you since we saw that... you know, in any detail, since we saw that plant in the centre of the garden and...’

ALEX (as Sumutnyerl)

‘Yes.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘... you know – with that, and with the information we’ve had, and you’ve been here for a while, haven’t you? A week, maybe?’

ALEX (as Sumutnyerl)

‘Yes.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘What do you think of the situation? Is this... does this fit with your knowledge of how the seed works? Could it do this? And, you know, do you know any way to stop it?’

ALEX (as Sumutnyerl)

‘We have always known that the Garden is more than a physical place. It is a... a meeting of places, is a better word. Places that are beyond here. These creatures, these things are from a different place. One which is somewhat darker and more vicious than our own, if the seed has been thus corrupted that it is a threat to even them. Again, presuming the truth of it that we are left to think that, [*sighs*], a threat to all worlds is greater than a threat to one, but I am no... I am no Wizard, I am no magician. I have no knowledge beyond that which I have learned, and we are very, very far beyond what I have ever learned.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘Fair. Fair. Yeah, I think I agree with Cel. My instinct is that we go along for now, but we have to stay wary given that we know the people we are working with definitely don’t have good intentions.’

HELEN/AZU

‘I agree, and...’

ALEX (as Sumutnyerl)

‘I would say...’

HELEN/AZU

‘... and if we go with him, we might have more information to make an even more informed decision as to what we do next, so... yeah.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Zolf?’

BEN/ZOLF

‘Er, yeah. Sure. Let’s do that.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘Skraak?’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘I’d rather kill a big scary monster than not kill the big scary monster.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Valid!’

ALEX (as Skraak)

‘If it’s a choice between living with a big scary monster and, you know, **[rrrreeuuurrrrghghghgh]**, I’ll probably pick the latter!’

LYDIA/CEL

‘I mean, it does seem that it is not open to negotiation. That does seem like there isn’t a third option...’

BRYN/HAMID

‘I had that impression.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘... usually very much in the negotiation frame of mind, but if it seems that, I mean, Wilde and Zolf, you’ve both spent, I think, a long time trying to fight with, and even talk with and study the blue-veins Simulacrum thing, and it hasn’t worked, so I’ll trust that that avenue is closed off and... kill the thing is the thing, so...’

ALEX (as Wilde)

‘Sounds like we have an agreement.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘... if that’s unanimous... er... grand! It’s all nice when we agree, isn’t it?’ Cel grins pointedly at everyone.

HELEN/AZU [laughing]

‘Yes.’

ALEX (also as Wilde)

Wilde leans forward and says, ‘Well, if I had to pick a group of people who I’d end up, you know, facing the end of the world with, you are who I would choose.’

ALL

Awwww....

LYDIA/CEL

‘That’s so sweet, Oscar!’

ALEX (as Wilde)

‘Oh, it was, wasn’t it!’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Yeah!’

ALEX (as Wilde)

‘Also, you know, the...’

(Group laughter)

LYDIA

Cel gives Wilde a hug.

ALEX

And I will take a break on that, and then we’ll be back in a couple of minutes for everything to be magically fine with no problems whatsoever! Yep?!

HELEN [laughing]

Yep, that’s what we agreed!

ALEX

Okay, back in two minutes! Bye!

And welcome back. So, it sounds to me like we're willing to go on our little merry scout jaunt to *the new place*. Does anyone have anything that they are going to be wanting to do beforehand? I am not going to be doing huge amounts of RP in transit because, you know, it's hostile territory! So if there's any conversations or prep that you want to do before leaving I'd suggest letting me know now!

BRYN/HAMID

'I guess just supplies, like, are there any stashed in the mansion, and are we, like, well this is the final push so we should take them all with us. Are we doling them out to everyone involved?'

ALEX

Wilde shares the information that he has been told which is that it is maybe a day's journey away because it is such slow travel, not because it's a huge distance. There are supplies here, certainly more than enough for the journey. There's enough to equip everyone with, like, dungeoneering supplies, let's call them, you know, crowbar, rope – that kind of thing.

BRYN

Refresh our dungeoneering packs!

LYDIA [talking over Bryn]

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But are there, like, healing... ?

BRYN [talking over Lydia]

Are there any, say, healing potions, for example?

HELEN

Yes. That's the major thing.

BRYN

That's probably the one thing that it's worth tracking more explicitly.

ALEX

In total, there are ten here.

LYDIA

Oooh! What, what kind? What level of healing potion?

BRYN

Given how many people there are, it probably means one each.

ALEX

Moderate.

LYDIA

Moderate wounds. Grand!

BRYN

I love that you've been wanting to reduce the number of NPCs travelling with the party at every opportunity, Alex, and you, you know, you managed to leave most of the boat crew behind, but then we accidentally took Sumutnyerl with us. And now we've accidentally picked up Gragg as well.

LYDIA [laughing]

He just wanted to the voice again!

ALEX

So, that is another thing, is that Gragg makes it known Gragg will not be coming with you!

HELEN

Okay.

(Lydia laughs)

BRYN

Why not? I mean, that can be an in-character question or an out-of-character question, but I think, to me, it seems logical that Gragg would.

ALEX

No, that's fine, that's fine. So, Gragg is not willing to for a couple of reasons. One, Gragg has a role down here which is to keep finding people who have managed to make it this far without support and then connect them up with

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supplies and other people, and so on, and Gragg thinks that role is too important. I won't RP it, but Gragg basically says, no one cares about Other London apart from Other Londoners, so I guess that means it's me.

HELEN

Ahhh...

ALEX

So, he's not willing to give up that job. That's the primary reason.

BRYN

That seems fair.

ALEX

The second one is that Barret basically says we're not interested in him we're interested in you. That's the nasty reason at his end, but Gragg's like, I wouldn't want to go anyway.

(Helen laughs)

BRYN

I mean, there is this whole we need muscle thing and Gragg is a lot of muscle...

HELEN

Mmm...

LYDIA

Yeah.

ALEX

Again, that is a logical thing. You should probably ask that later, but at this stage...

BRYN

I think I'm willing to accept.

ALEX

... those are the two answers you are given, but Gragg has explicitly been, like, I don't really care what Barret thinks, I don't want to go anyway. I'm doing something useful here and if I don't do it, people are going to suffer.

LYDIA

Cel trusts Gragg and Gragg's opinion, and Cel feels very out of their depth, so if Gragg seems like he doesn't think this is a good plan to go at all, Cel will become a lot more... like, is it Gragg thinks we should do this but he wants to do his job, or Gragg is very much against this plan?

ALEX

The former.

LYDIA

Okay.

ALEX

As far as Gragg's like, it's like, I mean, that sounds like a good plan, but I'm not about to abandon people down here because those monsters are big and scary. I am also big and scary. I would rather they get found by me than them.

LYDIA

Cool. That makes sense.

HELEN

Mmm. Azu is probably going to make a mental note of Gragg might be good in the Cult of Aphrodite!

ALEX

I think there's also an element of Gragg, sort of, splitting the world into things that he thinks are above his paygrade and things that aren't, if I'm being honest, and he's like, I can't save the world, but I can certainly make sure that any person I find down here, that their troubles are done.

LYDIA

I wonder where Sasha got her phrase from!

(Helen laughs)

BRYN

Yeah, I was thinking of the exact same sentence!

HELEN

Yeah.

ALEX

Any other preps that people want, RP or otherwise?

HELEN

Are we leaving immediately or do we have a chance to rest?

ALEX

I would say, Barret will be pushing for immediately, but if you all, like, no we're going to have a rest, Barret doesn't really have the ability to stop you!

HELEN

What do we think?

LYDIA

I'm just trying to find my Hit Points on this Character Sheet!

BRYN

I certainly want there to be a rest before the next big encounter, but I'm assuming that we're going to a place for more information rather than the next encounter, so I'm happy to carry on.

BEN

I'm just putting off re-preparing my spells as long as possible so...

BRYN

Yeah, Hamid's eased up approximately 50% of his spell slots, give or take.

ALEX

Then I would say, probably, Wilde will be the one saying let's take a rest.

HELEN

Cool. Four hours or eight hours?!

BEN [sighing heavily]

Ohhhh, okay.

ALEX

But if nothing else, it'll give Zolf some time to prepare new spells, so.

LYDIA

I'm back to full health, right, because I've had three days?

ALEX

Yeah, you probably would be at this point.

BRYN

Rusty Quill Gaming – [194] – [Full Circle]

Yeah, I take it both Hamid and Skraak still had some damage, but I'm going to assume if we take an eight hour rest that we can knock that off, basically.

ALEX

Yep, I'm fine for, basically, people to take an eight-hour rest and then press on. I would say that it is very difficult to keep passage of time here in terms of morning, day, noon or night, so it's not too difficult to rest.

HELEN

Sure.

ALEX

There's no natural light whatsoever so that makes it kinda easy! Also, you've had a rough time of it so I can understand you having that time.

HELEN

I am at 50% health so, yeah, that's why I asked about a rest.

ALEX

Yeah, that's fine. In which case, then, is everyone okay for me to jump ahead to everyone has had a rest?

LYDIA

Yeah.

BRYN

Yep.

ALEX

And are you ready for a fun metagame?

LYDIA

Oooh!

ALEX

The days of me needing to ask you all to give me Will Saves after your rest, the people who have been tracking you aren't bothering anymore, so we don't need to do that anymore!

LYDIA

Ohhhhhhh!!

BRYN

They've been... yeah. I've seen speculation about that, that they weren't actually saved against nightmares, but saved against [0:31:22].

ALEX

That's exactly what it was. I am happy to share that now because I don't need to do that anymore!

BRYN

I think, yeah... I think I also had that theory at one point, but certainly a lot later than I probably should have!

ALEX

So yeah, no, everyone goes to bed and doesn't have to give me any Saves when they wake up! What a brave new world we're in!

HELEN

Hurrah!

ALEX

So you all survive the night...

(Laughter)

... would people like to head onto their next location?

LYDIA

Yeah, let's go to the second location. It sounds wise... !

(Bryn laughs)

With a habitual kidnapper, yup!

HELEN

Secondary locations... hmmm...

ALEX (also as Barret)

In which case, then, yeah – the party assembles in the yard at the front, and Barret gives just the worst, like, prepare ever. It's not a pep talk, it's more like, 'You know, don't split up because that would be stupid. Don't make loud noises because that would be stupid. If you find yourself under attack, run away because fighting it would be stupid. If you get lost, come back here because if you try and find your way on your own you'll just die, which would be stupid.'

HELEN/AZU

'Alright. Okay. We get it, thank you. Except not thank you.'

ALEX

At which point, unless anyone says otherwise, I am going to have to, sort of, abstract this journey a little bit because I am not doing this in the standard Pathfinder/D&D search check for every five-foot square in case of traffic...

(Laughter)

... it's quite a long way. It'll take a while!

BRYN

Are there ten people travelling? Is that... ?

ALEX

So, the people who are travelling are Barret...

BRYN

... two Squizzards, four party members...

ALEX

... yep...

BRYN

... Oscar, Skraak, Sumutnyerl.

ALEX

Yes. Gragg is not coming with you.

BRYN

I make that ten.

ALEX

Yes. There was a reason there were ten potions. If there were not ten potions, and there's 11 people I've gained someone somewhere and I'm not sure where from! In which case, then, everyone sets off.

[sound of gate opening]

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Could I ask everyone, please, for a Stealth Roll. This will be abstracted, but yeah, a Stealth Roll, please.

LYDIA

Alright!

BEN

Five.

HELEN

That's an eight.

LYDIA

That's 23.

BRYN

36 for Hamid.

LYDIA

Oooh!

HELEN

Goodness me!

BRYN

And 28 for Skraak.

ALEX

Good grief! There's something very disturbing about having someone who can make explosions happen at will and also navigate stealthily. That's a very unpleasant combination. I don't like it. Azu, I can work with. Azu can punch down walls with sheer force of will, but, you know, everyone knows they're coming, I can work with that!

(Helen laughs)

BRYN

I mean, there's a reason a Halfling sorcerer is a good Pathfinder archetype!

ALEX

Okay, everyone starts heading off through what used to be Other London. Everyone is distributed so that you are not just travelling in a big clump, and so on, and there's a lot of element of, basically, the more stealthily proficient members are looking out for others. The Squizzards split themselves – one's at the very, very back, and one's at the very, very front, and occasionally they'll just call a halt for apparently no reason whatsoever, and then you'll hear a distant, ***[makes repetitive tutting/clicking noise]***, and then they'll carry on, and things like that. As you are travelling, it becomes apparent that there are a lot of these creatures around the place...

[tutting/clicking noises in background]

... Lots of, you know, [*makes more tutting/clicking noises*], and all that crap all over the place, so as a result it's echoing around the space, but they seem to be picking a very circuitous route that does seem to be avoiding all of the major issues. You make your way back, it's heading comparatively close to where Gragg's set up was, so I would say Gragg probably accompanies you for the first chunk, but then peels off and you take a different route. You start heading and, sort of, skirting the market place, which seems to be particularly busy with creatures at this point, and then very soon are made to a stairwell, you know, one of the major stairwells that are leading up and down, and start making your way up. I would say, for the sake of flavour and based on the rolls, there's probably a hairy moment or two where someone knocks something over, and then there's that flurry of activity, but...

LYDIA

Fool overtook!

ALEX

Yeah, a lot of that kind of thing...

BRYN

Hamid rolled 36. Hamid catches it before it hits the ground!

(Group laughter)

ALEX (also as Barret)

This is the kind of thing I'm talking about. I'm sort of taking an average of rolls rather than just seeing who rolled less than five, ha ha, everyone fails! I'm kind

of averaging it out quite a lot, so there's a lot of that picking up stuff that people are dropping and that kind of thing. As you make it to the stairwell and start climbing up, it starts being obvious as you've been travelling that there are more of the blue root networks, so not the actual creatures, but actual, like, big chunky roots have sort of perforated their way through this infrastructure that used to be Other London. You know, there'll be a pipe that has a little hole in it, and you can see that pipe is full of root and that kind of thing. As you make it to the stairwell, there's a little bit of a breather and another briefing which, effectively, boils down to, you're going to be going near the roots, don't mess with them. Don't go near them. Don't touch them. We're going to have to navigate them, but just don't mess with them, and one other thing that I'll do as Barret RP now, which is erm, 'And I just need to say one last thing in case anyone has an attack of stupidity as we've been discussing earlier, if one of the things see you, they all know where you are. If you are seen, you run, you do not hide, you run. If that means running back, that's fine, but do NOT stay where you are if you are seen. That doesn't just go for the creatures down here, those don't seem to connect in the same way, you know, they have less initiative, but we're going to be navigating a small portion of above ground, not for long, but when we do so do not be seen, and if you are, move. Does everyone understand me? I'm not going to die for the sake of someone being dense.'

HELEN/AZU

'Yes.'

BRYN

Hamid rolls his eyes and agrees.

HELEN

Azu is this... *this* close... like, ***[makes frustrated grumbling noise]***.

ALEX

Okay, in which case, then, people start heading up the stairwell. As you start heading up the stairwell, it's clear that this has been infiltrated by vines much, much heavier than other areas you've been. A lot of it seems to be coming from top down, it doesn't seem to be coming in from the sides or whatever. It feels like, maybe not *the* central hub, but certainly you know how roots branch, and then branch again, and branch again? You're quite far up that branching structure. There's quite a lot of biomass here. Still no sign of a single person though. So, you've not seen any bodies. You've not seen any corpses or anything like that, it's just a lot of blue glowing plant matter that's interspersed. As you start making your way up the stairwell, you start leaving behind that, sort of, ***[makes repetitive tutting/clicking noise]***, they seem to be denizens of Other London and as you start heading up this stairwell there seems to be less of them. And then, eventually, everyone hears this without...

[sound of heavy bell chiming]

... there's a ringing of a bell that might be very familiar for people...

HELEN

Oh dear.

ALEX

...and the blue glow of the vine surges in time with the ringing.

BRYN

Is it... when you say a familiar ringing bell, it is Big Ben?

ALEX

Yes! You shouldn't be able to hear...

HELEN [talking over Alex]

Ohhhhh. I thought it was a sleigh bell!

ALEX

No, no, it's not the silver bells! No, no, no. You shouldn't be able to hear Big Ben here, but...

LYDIA [whispering]

Is Big Ben evil?

ALEX

... you hear a harmonic sound coming from the vines themselves and they glow blue with the chime. As you continue heading up the stairway, it gets denser and denser until eventually you start seeing that there's, effectively, a climbing set up where, like, the actual stairs are overrun, but they have ropes and so on. I'm not going to get climb checks for people. We're not under a time pressure and they've got a bunch of extra climbing gear and so on. There'...

BRYN

We take ten.

ALEX (also as Barret)

Exactly. Like, there's a reason that exists, in this system I don't need it. It takes a while because you have to go one at a time to, sort of, get round this one bit, but I'd say after probably five or six hours of travel, once it's split out amongst the lower areas and then up through the stairwell carefully, and waiting, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah... you've all made it to the top of the stairwell and are, effectively facing a service door that's currently locked and, again, Barret, one last time goes, 'From here we are above ground. Remember what I said. You are going to be going straight down this corridor. You will go up a manhole. You will follow the alleyway that you are in. You will take a left. You will take a right, and you will climb down the next manhole.'

LYDIA/CEL

'Are you not coming?'

ALEX (as Barret)

'Yes! But if you are seen, you now know the route.'

LYDIA/CEL

'Uh huh. Gonna turn invisible.'

ALEX (as Barret)

‘If you can do stuff like that, now’s the time.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Yeah.’ Cel will say, ‘My potions only work on myself, but I think it, you know...’

BRYN/HAMID

‘I could potentially turn everyone invisible, but we won’t know where each other is, and these things do also locate with sound, so far, but that’s the things down below. Is that the same?’

ALEX (as Barret)

‘The things above don’t work like that. Think of them as different species. I don’t know what they are.’

BRYN/HAMID

‘Very well. Is it sensible to make everyone invisible at the risk of losing each other?’

ALEX (as Barret)

‘Yes. If you can.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Maybe Barret could remain visible and we could follow him.’

ALEX (as Barret)

‘That’s fine. If anything sees me, I’m just going to get teleported away anyway.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘Okay, so we have not addressed the idea that you have some kind of, like, no... who is going to be teleporting you?’

ALEX

Points to Squizzard number one.

LYDIA/CEL

‘Why can’t you teleport us to the place that we need to get to?’

ALEX (as Barret)

‘Because if you could teleport in there it wouldn't be safe.’

LYDIA/CEL

‘But you could teleport next to it.’ Like, Cel... that is the *meanest* you have ever heard Cel, like... arrrggghhh! It’s like there’s these layers of, like, very deliberate, careful kindness and they’ve been scraped away...’

(Group laughter)

ALEX

I’m going to peel you like an onion, Cel!

(Group laughter)

LYDIA/CEL

No, it's like, *[through gritted teeth]*, 'You could teleport us next to it, you absolute idiot!'

ALEX

Barret doesn't answer. He's just like, no.

[sound of magical spells being cast]

BRYN

I will cast invisibility on the remaining three party members and the three friendly NPCs. Not the Squizzards or Barret.

ALEX

Okay, cool. In which case, then, Barret gestures to one of the Squizzards, because, God knows, Barret isn't going to be the person to stand at the front and open a door...

[sound of creaking door opening]

... and the Squizzard does so and opens the door. It seems to lead into, effectively, yeah, not a sewage hatch, but a service layer, but it appears far more, frankly, less ruinous than a lot of Other London has been. You know, that's a deep, deep chunk of the city that's been broadly forgotten a lot of the

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time. This is actually, it seems to be a one maintained, if not still actively maintained, service tunnel, and Barret and the first Squizzard start heading through very, very carefully. They make their way to a manhole, turn around to check on the party, sees no one there...

(Group laughter)

... gives a shrug, then climbs up and lifts up the manhole cover, and the first thing that happens is... can everyone give me a Perception Check?!

LYDIA

Oh no!

[Sound of dice being rolled]

BEN

15.

HELEN

20.

LYDIA

18.

BRYN

25 for Hamid. 22 for Skraak.

ALEX

Okay. In which case, then, the second the manhole is pulled back the first thing which is a little bit of a shock to the system is the sounds of an active city filter down. All of Other London has been broadly empty apart from monsters and, you know, the remnants of application that were once there, the sounds of an active city filter through. It's a bit of a shock to the system, like, I know... okay, that's interesting. Hamid, you notice one extra salient factor. There are no voices. There's footfall...

BRYN

Creepy!

ALEX

... there's construction, there is, you know, carts going past, there's movement and there's loading and there's unloading, but there doesn't seem to be a single voice that's been said. The rest have just lost that in the shock of, oh, city! But there is not a single voice in the city as far as you can tell.

HELEN

That's very frightening.

BRYN/HAMID

'Erm, keep the same marching order, just tap the ladder gently when you get to the top to indicate the next person can go.'

ALEX (also as Barret)

‘That’s a good idea. He might survive.’ Barret climbs up and heads out into the alleyway, and I’m presuming people follow in normal marching order?

ALL

Mmm hmm.

ALEX

Good idea on the tap, tap – that’s avoiding all kinds of faff!

BRYN

You have to find interesting ways to coordinate when you’ve got a whole group of invisible people!

(Helen laughs)

ALEX

Yep! So, you are in a mucky alley. Think lots of, like, crates left around, like, rotten wood.

LYDIA

Oh, for, like, dramatic circuitousness, is this the same alley where Bertie, Zolf and Hamid initially found Sasha?

ALEX

It is now, yes!

(Group laughter)

HELEN

Ahhhh...

ALEX

'Cos that's, yeah, I hadn't had that one. It is now. I'm going to claim that!
That was mine! That was my idea!

(Group laughter)

BRYN

It means, in the eventual animated show you can use the same background
from episode one!

ALEX

Ohhhhh!! Yeah, we can reuse assets! You geniuses!! That's saved at least
£100! Wooaaaaahhh!!

(Group laughter)

Also, Alex is well aware he grossly underestimated how long it takes and how
much it costs to make assets!

(Group laughter)

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I love the creator in me just went, don't let people assume it's only £100, that's a terrible idea!

(Laughter)

BRYN

But also, how easy it would be to preserve one for six years!

ALEX

Don't, just don't!

(Laughter)

So, anyway! Yeah, you are in that alley, although the only people who might recognise it are Hamid and Zolf, and even then, Hamid rocked up to that party a little later than the others so, yeah! It leads down deeper between some buildings, and that seems quite full. It seems like it might have had extra stuff shoved in here, almost barricade-style where it's less that it's an alley than you are picking your way through a maze of garbage, effectively. As you pick your way through, yeah, it's clear that there is activity all around you in the city, but there are no windows on the backs of these buildings. You are right in the centre of the mid-gap. I think Terry Pratchett described it best where it's like, you know, you have a building, you have another building, someone tarps over the building between but forgets that there was a space between the two and you end up in this weird liminal spaces that no one really owns? That.

HELEN

Mmm...

ALEX

Heading through the alleyway, yeah, you take your first left, and then Barret calls for a stop. Gestures to the empty air that he assumes is the party, gestures to his eyes and points down a side alley that is not the route that has been described, and then does a terrible mime of, like, you know, the hand for tip-toeing?!

HELEN [laughing]

Thank you for also doing that mime!

(Group laughter)

ALEX

And then, effectively, Barret then peeks around the corner, waits and waits, and then darts across quickly. Obviously, the rest of you don't need that kind of precaution, but I would say that as you go past, you can see to your right a busy street full of people.

LYDIA

Hmmm...

ALEX

All of them seem to have exposed blue-vein that you've known as the, sort of, the infection. It isn't a case of varying stages though. It's not like some of them are full-blown plant-creatures and some people are not. It seems uniform in its, sort of... generic, is the best way I can describe it. But they're all in some form of construction activity – wheelbarrows, carrying crates, handing out tools or whatever – it all seems to be construction-focussed on the street, and it's eerily coordinated.

LYDIA

What are they building?

ALEX

Lots of cues that are 'step, step, wait; step, step, wait' that kind of thing, and carrying on down that alleyway, you take the extra turning and then Barret turns round to look at all of you and then points towards what seems to be an inn at the far end of the alleyway, and what seems to be, if you look carefully, a manhole cover that's just slightly open before the back of that inn. And then he starts creeping towards it, heading towards the manhole cover. Could you all do me a favour? Could you please roll me Perception Checks.

HELEN

Yeah.

[Sound of dice being rolled]

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BEN

30, with a nat 20.

HELEN

Ooooh! 31, also with a natural 20!

BRYN

Nice!

ALEX

Nice!

LYDIA

15. With a two!

BRYN

29 for Hamid, and 18 for Skraak.

ALEX

Zolf, Hamid and Azu all notice that, even though it's an alleyway, there is a, sort of, weather-beaten bit of lettering across the top of the inn, because it's probably got it on all sides or something, it's very, very old. It's not been maintained, at this angle. Azu probably wouldn't clock it as anything particularly significant. Hamid and Zolf, you can just make out the name of the inn, 'The One That Got Away'.

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[someone gasps]

(Bryn laughs)

LYDIA

You... !!

(Group laughter)

ALEX

And I'll close the episode there!

(Group laughter)

HELEN

Oh!

BRYN

That is the stupidest answer to a long-lost piece of random information!

HELEN

Do you know how much debate there's been.

LYDIA

You actual, literal monster!

(Group laughter)

BRYN

Is that really what you meant at the time? Really though?

ALEX [laughing]

It really is!! It really, really is!!

(Bryn groans)

I've got nothing further for this episode! I've been sat on that for so long!

(Group laughter)

And just telling me to, yeah, bleep it **[BEEP]** off is everything that I wanted and more! Thank you so much, Helen!

(Group laughter)

HELEN

You little chaos gremlin! You goblin of a man!

BRYN

Oh, you should see his face, people! He is so...

HELEN [crying with laughter]

He's so happy...

LYDIA

He's so happy!!

BRYN

... it's awful...

LYDIA

... it's like a pure joy that you just see... You know when, like, a toddler has done a really big fart...

(Group laughter)

... like, it's that, like, I have power that you didn't even know...

ALEX

But I did, Lydia! Look at what I did!

LYDIA

... kind of joy... !

ALEX

Right. okay, well on the bright side, everyone gets to find out what's in there next week, so until then, bye everyone!

EVERYONE

Bye!

[Show Theme - Outro]

ALEX

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ALEX [laughing]

I found the imposter, guys!

(Laughter)

It's number 11! You look around – yes, there it is – Hamid, Azu, Cel, Hamid, wait...

(Group laughter)

LYDIA

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Yeaahhhh?!!! I can only think of all those, like, TikToks and things where people are miming DJ-ing the, like, BBC News thing...

(Group laughter)

... and then they're like, *[brrrp, ba dum dum, brrrp, ba dum dum, brrrp, ba dum dum...]*

HELEN

Yeah, but with vines...

ALEX

It's just a very organic, very expensive visualiser. It turns out that's the end-goal here, it's just to make the biggest visualiser in the multi-verse!

(Helen laughs)

LYDIA

That's cool! And then you're going to project that through a sound-scaping mechanism!

ALEX

Naturally!

(Group laughter)