

RQG – 127 – Welcome Back

Content Warnings

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ALEX

Hi everyone, Alex here. I'd just like to take a moment to thank some of our patrons. Nathaniel M, Elle Adams, Ezra Bow, Lionel Ambrose, Taylor Lévesque, Laila, Fatal Drum, Alexis, Noelagirl, Corm, Jason Green, Zephurix, Andrew Wilson, Smith, Bobby Brill, Gregory Craddock, Jonathan Basil, Ruth Jones, Noman, Rhiannon Hundley. Thank you all. We really appreciate your support. If you'd like to join them go to www.patreon.com/rustyquill and take a look at our rewards.

[Show Theme - Intro]

ALEX

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

BRYN

Bryn Monroe

HELEN

And Helen Gould

ALEX

It's feeling a bit light but it's the first of the modern...

BRYN

Alex...Alex, Alex. This is season 3 and I can't help but notice that you haven't...put half the party in the room?

ALEX

Oh well about that. Yeah. Gone now. So...

BRYN

No, no, no. I'm not...I'm not ok with this. When...last time I was here, they were trapped in the past. We were all in the episode. I assumed that would continue.

HELEN

Yeah. That hasn't happened. Just so you know we have no idea.

ALEX

So listeners all know what's happening. You two...

HELEN

We've got no idea!

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ALEX

Information blackout.

BRYN

Oh yeah because they've been recording stuff without us

HELEN

Yeah

ALEX

So listeners have now listened to the entirety of...

BRYN

I assume we were having the exciting adventure of them coming back to the present Alex.

ALEX

Well who knows? Maybe if we can get this intro done I'll...

BRYN

I'm very disappointed with you.

ALEX

...they'll spontaneously teleport in going goodness me, what an exciting adventure with no ramifications whatsoever

BEN

I mean they could be downstairs and I could just be playing with the audience

HELEN

They could be in the room being very, very quiet

BRYN

Who knows?

ALEX

I mean that's extremely unlikely. But no so we have completed all of the sort of Rome...is it a prologue midlogue? But we are now entering into the final season. The Endgame Season

BRYN

Season 4

ALEX

Where once there were four...

BRYN

Endgames trademark

HELEN

Yeah that's...

ALEX

So I'm going to go ahead and skip ahead to, you know, recapping you which is you make it back from spooks Rome as in literally some other horrific plane into central Rome which is just generic spooky instead of hyper spooky

HELEN

Oh yeah

ALEX

You made it out with all hostages which was good.

BRYN

Yeah! Woo for the hostages

ALEX

Grizzop left behind. Sasha left behind Eldarion left behind.

BRYN

We worked out what happened to them

ALEX

You have managed to sort of decode what happened which is that Azu basically just failed the party

HELEN

Argh!

BRYN

Why are you like this?

HELEN

Alexander!

ALEX

Einstein has been useful, unlike every other NPC that was ever created

HELEN

Yeah!

BRYN

Einstein's the fricking best.

ALEX

And you all are stacked up with your recent pack. I can remind you what's in there if you need but I don't think you do.

BRYN

I've written it down

ALEX

Good

HELEN

I think I did

ALEX

In which case then, among other things you all levelled

BRYN

Yeah! Level 8 baby

ALEX

So what did we get in our levelling?

HELEN

I nearly got 69 hit points but I decided to go a bit better. I got 70 but it would've been very nice.

ALEX

Yeah but it's not nice is it? It's 70.

HELEN

I know. I got a not nice number of hit points.

ALEX

Anything else?

HELEN

I hit harder now because of my sadness.

(laughing)

ALEX

You do have a mournful axe so the sadder your life becomes the harder you'll hit.

HELEN

The louder the wailing!

BRYN

Channel it into your rage

HELEN

Yes

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ALEX

Oh you took a level in barbarian, I didn't know.

HELEN

Possibly. Who knows?

ALEX

Any other abilities that you gained?

HELEN

I just got better at all the stuff that I already have

ALEX

That's a perfectly legitimate levelling. How about you Hamid?

BRYN

Yeah not much to say about this level. I got slightly better at a bunch of the stuff I already do and I got a new spell. Slightly off the wall choice

ALEX

See I don't know what you've picked yet because we've been discussing it but I don't know.

BRYN

It's called rainbow pattern

ALEX

Good choice.

HELEN

Ooh.

ALEX

Good choice. We like that spell.

BRYN

I mean it seems like it's pretty similar to what the squizards were casting against Sasha back in Rome because it basically creates a hypnotic pattern of lights and whoever the spell works on can't do anything except stare.

HELEN

That does sound like what happened to Sasha

BRYN

Stare into it. It can affect multiple people. There's some rules about that.

ALEX

Rules happen and then...

BRYN

If I cast it, if it works we'll get into the rules in more detail

ALEX

Absolutely. Absolutely.

BRYN

But basically yeah, so a bunch of people stop doing whatever they're doing and stare at the pretty lights unless you threaten them. If you threaten them it instantly stops

HELEN

So it allows us to run away basically

BRYN

Yeah but...well it can also, I can make it float away and lead them off which is quite a nice touch

ALEX

Does it work on rats?

BRYN

I assume so, yeah

ALEX

Nice! I'm going to rewrite the campaign. So we are going to pick up pretty much where we left off at the end of...oh my...it's soooo long.

BRYN

God it's ages

ALEX

And it's been even longer for listeners because I've inserted some specials.

BRYN

It's been quite a lot of time for us as well.

ALEX

Yeah it has. So you have had your info download from Einstein

BRYN

Yeah but it wasn't super helpful

ALEX

He tries. He does try. At the moment though you are in the situation where you've had all the info and were like cool, so shall we go to Cairo I guess.

BRYN

So kind of Cairo, anyone who didn't want to keep adventuring to stay in Cairo, we'd take further stock of the situation and then he said he'd take us to Curie so we can try and find out what went wrong with the...

HELEN

Yes

ALEX

Everything

BRYN

...plane shift spell to see if there's a way to rescue Grizzop and Sasha

HELEN

And also Curie was leading the resistance against the...

BRYN

Yeah the meritocrats are having a convocation to decide what to do.

ALEX

Convocation. Nice.

BRYN

It's not my first fantasy novel.

ALEX

So I'm going to jump in, kind of a bit, mushily rather than a hard in. What is your current game?

BRYN

Mostly we want to find out what's going on.

HELEN

Yeah

ALEX

So your first way of doing that is?

HELEN

Didn't you want to go and check on your family?

BRYN

I mean I need to take...well I mean...

HELEN

Yeah you took your brother back

BRYN

My brother is still a child and his twin is older than him so that's going to be weird for them both. I mean we've been gone 18 months.

HELEN

Wow

BRYN

So we should probably go see my family.

HELEN

They'll have all been mourning you

BRYN

Yeah probably

ALEX

So heading to Cairo first then

HELEN AND BRYN

Yeah

BRYN

So I invite everyone to come and stay at my family's house because that's what I'm like.

ALEX

So Einstein...

BRYN

But obviously, you know, people may want to go to their own homes and stuff

HELEN

I'm going to want to check in at the Temple of Aphrodite and see who's still around

BRYN

That's a good point, yeah

ALEX

So Einstein takes the two of you aside a little bit just before this and goes – so what...oh it's been so long, there he is! Hello. So you know don't panic. Cairo's pretty beaten up now. You know there's not many people...

BRYN

Yeah you said it's slightly...it's safe but it's been on the front of the war

ALEX

You know what, it's just gonna be easier to show you but don't freak out. Ok. If you can't find people straight away, you've got to learn how to look, ok.

HELEN

Ok

ALEX

Einstein's got you covered.

BRYN

Ok

ALEX

Ok but just roll chill, yeah

HELEN

No promises

BRYN

We'll try.

ALEX

All chill.

BRYN

We'll try professor.

ALEX

Cool. I can't take everyone at once because there's a lot of people so I'm going to have to make a few trips here.

BRYN

Ok

ALEX

Do you wanna go first, do you wanna go last? You could go in the middle if you want but you know

BRYN

Well I'd like to...

ALEX

I know a safe place to arrive

BRYN

...stay with my brother but probably best if either me or Azu stays until the last trip

HELEN

Yeah I'll stay and make sure nothing goes wrong or...

BRYN

Ok well take me first and I'll make sure that where we go is safe too.

ALEX

Ok cool. In that case let's go. He goes into the central room and then in a really, I'm not going to RP it. He's really not good at taking charge of a situation so instead of it being like you, you, you with me, then you're all next, then you're all next, form a queue, it's more like I mean so if everyone like...if everyone...buddy up and then...

BRYN

I will do that. As soon as I see him struggling I will step in and manage.

ALEX

Cool. In which case then I am gonna just jump ahead a little bit rather than separate and stagger it out because it doesn't really need to happen. Einstein begins teleporting people out. Among other things you notice that he seems to be using some kind of magical ring or something, most likely he's been given it to help him in doing this because he's...let's put it this way even for Einstein he's teleporting a lot of people, like quite far from central Rome. So he's getting help somewhere but yeah he begins shuttling people. To make it really easy he shuttles you into what appears to be a slightly beaten up Egyptian style waiting room. It's quite sandy floors, benches and so on. It has a few cots up against the wall. You don't hear the sounds of any activity outside. You hear certain sounds of maybe there's a storm going on outside or something but beyond that it's a very, very, how do I put it...gentle start. It's not a deliberately

featureless room but it's clear that this is where he's been teleporting to and from. There's some more like evidence of him stockpiling stuff and blah, blah, blah, blah. So unless you immediately wander off...

BRYN

No, no.

ALEX

...he shuttles everyone back in and then encourages everyone to have another sit and chill to on the cots and then he comes over to you two. Ok so good news. Not in Rome. Because Rome's the worst!

HELEN

True that is a good part

BRYN

Yeah we did not have a great time there

ALEX

So welcome....home...sort of. Ok

BRYN

Best to just get it over with professor. We've got to face the brave, new world

HELEN

Azu goes over to the nearest door and just opens it.

ALEX

You find yourself looking at a quite severely sandy set of stairs leading up to where there's clearly a storm going on. Ooh, ooh, I gave you gear. Sand gear. You may wanna give it a go

BRYN

Ok everybody, time to bundle up and I start...

ALEX

Oh I wouldn't take everyone straight away. You might wanna see the lay of the land first

HELEN

I'm going

BRYN

Oh ok.

ALEX

Right. Goggles on

HELEN AND BRYN

Yep

ALEX

Scarfs up. He starts heading up the stairs. There's a big building up of sand, there's a pair of, what are they called, storm...you know like a storm basement?

BRYN

Storm cellar

ALEX

Storm cellar style. Throws those open. Takes a lot of help. Basically he needs help from Azu because it's been piled up a little bit. Turns out he doesn't really use doors that much

(laughing)

HELEN

Just teleports from the other side

ALEX

What's the point, you know. It's really heavy. There's a big sand build up. A lot of sand pores in a little bit and he climbs up. There is a minor sandstorm happening. It's not horrendous. It's not blowing Hamid away like when he first arrived at Cairo but also give me a perception check both of you.

HELEN

Ok

BRYN

Oh my brand new perception score. 19

HELEN

17

ALEX

Both of you take a moment to recognise where you are. You appear to be in one of the guardhouses of Hamid's family estate which has been completely reclaimed by desert. There are tracks of sand across the lawns, the railings around the outside are still there, the building's intact. Couple of broken windows but it has been heavily reclaimed by the elements. Sand, a few of the trees have blown over and so on and you notice that the front gates are chained up. Einstein sort of turns to you and then gestures towards the main building.

BRYN

Oh...oh, ok.

ALEX

It's a little hard going but he gets you up towards the front doors and then he takes a moment and gives basically a strange knock. A pattern knock. And also

it's not like a do, do, do, do, do. It takes about 30 seconds. It's almost like someone has done it properly and he seems to be getting it right. He hasn't been like oh, er. There's no activity for a while and then he gestures for you to follow him again and then he starts heading around the back of the building

BRYN

Sure

HELEN

Are any of the others with us by the way?

ALEX

Einstein strongly advised you to keep the others in the guardhouse.

BRYN

Well to some degree it's up to them. Did any of them...I mean Vesseek seemed like the most likely to want to come with us

ALEX

Vesseek stepped forward and was like that's fine, holding the sword, he was like yeah. I'll kill anyone that comes down here, no worries.

BRYN

What about Ed? We got Ed back as well

HELEN

Oh my gosh!

BRYN

Ed's basically part of the party. We don't understand the difference between a PC and a NPC

ALEX

Do you want Ed with you?

BRYN

Yeah

ALEX

It can go either way. Cool. Ed's with you. I'm going to recon that easily. That's fine. He's with you. He's feeling a bit overwhelmed. He's not panicking. He's just like – this is all a lot

BRYN

I agree Ed. I agree

ALEX

So Einstein takes you around the back of the building to what is, effectively, a servant's entrance kitchen style and then gives a different knock and then the door opens and he steps in and gestures for you all to come in. You find

yourself in the main kitchen for the Tahan residence with someone you don't recognise at all. Although the outside looks abandoned and windswept and blah, blah, blah, the interior seems to actually be in comparatively decent nick. Like the kitchen's held together. Something is currently cooking.

BRYN

That's a good sign

ALEX

Einstein starts shaking off his stuff and Ed's like oh. Right. Your place looks well manky on the outside but it's actually alright on the inside. Who lives here?

BRYN

This is where my family lives Ed.

ALEX

Ok cool. So...

BRYN

Or used to?

HELEN

That's a good question

ALEX

Einstein takes a moment, talks Arabic to...oh no does everyone speak Arabic?

BRYN

Yeah

HELEN

Yes

BRYN

I mean Ed probably doesn't.

ALEX

Ed doesn't. You know what, Ed *really* doesn't.

(laughing)

Ed doesn't even speak foreigner British person abroad which is loud and slow. So in Arabic Einstein's like – so I'm going to lead them in slowly. Can everyone just give us a little bit of space. I don't want to overwhelm them.

The kid, maybe 18, seems to be wearing plain clothes, lot of pockets and so on. Looks...has this kind of militia vibe about him. Sort of gives a salute and then backs up to the back door.

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BRYN

This is the servant who opened the back door?

ALEX

Yeah you don't recognise them

BRYN

Yeah

ALEX

They are a complete stranger to you

HELEN

Are they a halfling?

ALEX

They are not.

BRYN

Ok

HELEN

Ooh. Ok

ALEX

They are human

BRYN

Sure

ALEX

Ok. Come on then. Einstein starts leading you out of the kitchen in towards the main atrium which is actually a hive of quiet activity. There are a few people at desks sort of writing. There's a couple of people having a hushed communicates exchange and blah, blah, blah and it becomes readily apparent that the Tahan residence has become retrofitted into some kind of like apparently abandoned but like base but not like in a, you don't see loads of armed guards tramping around. It has more the idea of maybe administrative...

BRYN

Bureaucracy

ALEX

...espionage. Who knows? But it's quite quiet. It has a more...here's a reference for you, World War 2, you know the whole enigma machine thing

HELEN

Ooh yes

ALEX

Lots of...

BRYN

Bletchley Park

ALEX

Bletchley Park. That's the word. It has a Bletchley Park vibe. Everyone's quite quiet...

HELEN

Is Alan Turing gonna turn up?

ALEX

I dunno

HELEN

Don't do that!

BRYN

I mean we're a bit early for Alan Turing but why not. I mean it's, you know, classic Alex just throw in characters from all over history.

ALEX

So yeah there's this quiet activity and you see that they've been using your furniture. They haven't brought in external stuff so you're seeing these people who are sat typing and so on in a big, plush...

BRYN

And again mostly humans?

ALEX

Mostly humans but you do see a few halflings as well kicking around

BRYN

Good, good

ALEX

At some point you do notice a couple of halflings that you definitely recognise as servants of yours once upon a time.

HELEN

Are they the ones that we were hanging out with when we were all getting drunk?

ALEX

See this will mean nothing to Helen or Bryn but the natural 1 dice continues to deliver. I have a dice I roll specifically for natural 1s. They don't notice you two. They seem to be busy in some capacity.

BRYN

Are the people in the house halfling and human Egyptian? European? In appearance

ALEX

A complete mix

BRYN

Ok

ALEX

There seems to be...in fairness, I say a complete mix, there seems to be slightly more Egyptian than non-Egyptian but it is a complete melting pot

HELEN

International spies

ALEX

Yeah. There is no...there is no predominant thing. Maybe slightly Egyptian just because a couple of the servants that you recognise and so on have tipped that scale a little bit but it isn't predominantly one...

BRYN

But there are people who look European around?

ALEX

Absolutely, absolutely. And yeah Einstein he kind of takes this hushed voice and goes – ok cool. So I'm going to take you to a room. I'm going to give you a little bit more info and then we're gonna meet Curie, ok?

BRYN

Oh I was hoping some of my family might be around professor

ALEX

This is what the little room's for, ok

BRYN

Ok

ALEX

Ok

HELEN

You should tell us that as soon as possible.

ALEX

This is what the little room's for.

BRYN

Hamid...

ALEX

This is what the little room's for, I promise you.

BRYN

Hamid reaches out to Azu and like holds hands if she'll let him

HELEN

Absolutely.

ALEX

As you're walking Einstein's like – oh I just realised, big faux pas, everyone's fine.

BRYN

Ok! Ok!

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ALEX

Everyone's absolutely fine

BRYN

Oh god!

ALEX

I am so bad

HELEN

Yes!

ALEX

Oh you lot are fine too. They're well out of it

HELEN

Good

ALEX

Yeah it's all good. It's all good. Sorry. You know I bury the lead sometimes you know

HELEN

Alright, ok

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BRYN

Also they probably think we're dead

ALEX

Oh yeah. Everyone thinks you're dead

BRYN

Ok

ALEX

Which reminds me please don't make a big scene, people will react. Ok. Cool.

We all good for the little room? He's brought you upstairs to...

BRYN

Sure. Let's just do it.

HELEN

Take us there

ALEX

Cool. Takes you into what used to be your brother's bedroom

BRYN

Which brother?

HELEN

The drunk one?

ALEX

Basically yes.

BRYN

Saleh

ALEX

Saleh, yeah. Leads you in, closes it. You see that there's still a bed in there but there's also a bunch of crates and stuff as well.

Ok so your family...so Cairo gets a lot of refugees and so on but the actual city is mostly kind of gone because of the weather.

BRYN

People have moved away and...

ALEX

Yeah so refugees sort of come in through Cairo. It's a good place to meet but you can't really live here anymore so everyone heads further inland you know. But...

BRYN

Up the river?

ALEX

I mean pretty much anywhere as long as it's inland

BRYN

Ok

ALEX

The river gets a lot of the traffic. Anyhoo your family...they've already moved further inland but they...they donated this estate to...basically to Curie to help out with all the stuff and it's a pretty cool base. I mean no one looks for us. The place is pretty much abandoned around here so it's kind of comfy, cosy, you know. They had me teleporting in lots of stuff instead of people, that was kind of boring but, you know, as a result it's pretty cool. Curie doesn't know you're here yet.

BRYN

Sure

HELEN

How could she?

ALEX

So there's a reason that I'm asking you to wait here so I can tell her and then we'll see. Ok?

HELEN

Why would it matter? Why would she know who we are?

BRYN

I mean I met her before.

ALEX

Yeah they have history

HELEN

Oh

BRYN

I mean not much but well also she's now apparently living in my family's house

ALEX

That is super weird, you know. Baby steps

BRYN

I mean maybe you could answer this question before we meet her professor. You know my sister who was in charge of the family when I left was one of...was an aide to Apophis...

ALEX

Oh yeah, yeah

BRYN

...and I mean it feels like a big step to then donate one's house to one of the leaders of the Harlequins but maybe that distinction isn't so important anymore?

HELEN

Is Apophis still around?

BRYN

Well you said the meritocrats are...

ALEX

Sort of yes..

BRYN

...alive but not doing much

ALEX

...but sort of no. Again I really would rather hand this over to Curie. You're kind of stressing me out here

BRYN

Ok, ok.

HELEN

Sure

ALEX

It's all ok. It's all ok. Promise you

HELEN

Ok, right

ALEX

Einstein heads out and gives you both a moment of peace

HELEN

It's not all ok

BRYN

And Ed

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ALEX

And Ed, sorry

BRYN

He's still here

ALEX

Ed's still there. For what it's worth Ed's actually been quite quiet

HELEN

I don't know what we're going to do.

BRYN

We'll have to figure it out

ALEX

Yeah.

BRYN

Still want to ask Curie about the spell and...

ALEX

So who's Curie?

BRYN

Curie was the head of the university at Prague. Probably the most knowledgeable and intelligent wizard in the world

ALEX

Oh right. I mean yeah but I mean also Friedrich so you know

HELEN

Who's that?

ALEX

Oh I should check in on him. Oh it's been ages

HELEN

It has, yes

ALEX

He might be like in charge of the church now.

BRYN

Who's...

ALEX

Friedrich. You'd like Friedrich. He's good.

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BRYN

Ok

ALEX

Ed now just starts chatting about Friedrich for a while unless you stop him

BRYN

No it passes the time

HELEN

Yeah

BRYN

I'm stressed. I might go back to holding Azu's hand again if she'll let me.

ALEX

For Helen's benefit just so you know, Friedrich was basically Ed's handler

HELEN

Oh!

ALEX

His almost babysitter

HELEN

Aw!

ALEX

Because Ed technically isn't a paladin yet. He's kind of a paladin in training.
The last bit is to do your pilgrimage to Rome and then he got lost

HELEN

Well he's completed that now so now he's a new paladin

ALEX

Technically yes! So now he's a paladin. At some point he realises going – oh
woah! That's crazy

BRYN

Congratulations

ALEX

Yeah

HELEN

Yes, well done

ALEX

Einstein finally makes it back going – ok, she's super happy to see you

BRYN

Oh

HELEN

Really?

BRYN

Ok

ALEX

Well I mean everyone thought you were dead

BRYN

Sure let's do this

ALEX

Ok cool. He leads you across to what used to be, briefly, Saira's office, kind of knocks and then gestures for you to go in. I should probably...

BRYN

Hamid has prestidigitated on the way so that he's looking his absolute best. He summons up...summons up some composure

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ALEX

I mean you can go in without me.

HELEN

Yeah

ALEX

Cool, cool.

BRYN

I suppose so.

ALEX

I'll be around. I'm gonna go...just start bringing people into the house from the...from the guardhouse but I need to let everyone know that I'm about to bring 30 people into the house, you know.

HELEN

Sure

BRYN

Well 8.

ALEX

Yeah. Einstein leaves

(laughing)

Do you head in?

HELEN

Of course

BRYN

I probably knock first

ALEX

Ok

HELEN

I want to go right in there without knocking

BRYN

I will literally go to knock...I mean partly it's just force of habit because this used to be my dad's office and my dad is scary.

ALEX

Scary!

BRYN

Or at least he was when I was a kid and messing up all the time

HELEN

Azu just wants to get to the next terrible thing so she just pushes both the doors open

BRYN

Sure

ALEX

Curie sees you and stands – well I don't believe we've met. Ok Curie in a nutshell for Helen's benefit. Spoilers. Like Helen helped me put onto this as a phrase, Curie is Helen Mirren from Red in terms of looks. That's pretty much mentally what I've got going but in the no nonsense clothing. Like greying hair but held back practically and so on. She has heavy, heavy wear on her face though. She's a 50 with city miles.

HELEN

Ooh

ALEX

She's been having a rough time of it. You also notice Hamid that there is a fresh scar running from her ear to the middle of her chin on the left hand side of her face and she also appears to be favouring the other side of her body a little bit

HELEN

Sure

BRYN

I can't say it's a pleasure to see you again after everything that's happened but I'm...Einstein tells me you've been doing some very good things so thank you for that.

ALEX

Would you humour me if I ask you a couple of incredibly important questions quickly and then I will answer any question that you have?

BRYN

Seems fair

ALEX

Did Eldarion make it back?

BRYN

No

ALEX

Curie stops. Turns around and for a moment it's like looking at your father again, stood looking out at what's left of the mostly shuttered wind across the sands

BRYN

Reading someone's emotions from their featureless back

ALEX

Yeah you have proper flashback moment to you as a child holding a broken vase as your father looks out over the grounds. Flashback in. She turns around. Azu gets a sense motive because Azu has enough sense motive for this

HELEN

Yeah

ALEX

Hamid I don't...I mean give it a go but you're gonna have to roll pretty high

HELEN

23

BRYN

10

ALEX

Yeah. Azu you reckon Curie and Eldarion have some history. You don't know what. You don't know specifics...

BRYN

Oooh!

ALEX

...but she seems more affected by this than losing a solider or something

HELEN

Lesbian elders!

ALEX

But then Curie takes a moment, turns around going – that's a severe blow for the cause.

BRYN

I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news

ALEX

It's fine

HELEN

She sacrificed herself bringing us back so...

ALEX

That sounds about right. Did any of you discover anything useful about the Simulacrum etc. while you were there? There's a chance

BRYN

In Rome?

HELEN

We didn't really

ALEX

Nothing?

BRYN

No

ALEX

That's a long shot.

BRYN

We made significant progress before we were side-tracked to Rome but obviously it seems the world has changed a great deal. I don't know if anything we were doing or knew was relevant to what's happening now.

HELEN

We assume you know what happened in Damascus?

ALEX

Yes, yes I managed to get an update from an agent

BRYN

Oscar Wilde, is he still...

ALEX

Curie gives a moment. What would make you say that?

BRYN

He was working with us

HELEN

Yeah

ALEX

I'm sure I wouldn't know anything about working with a meritocratic officer.

Curie sits down.

BRYN

Really? Really? You're gonna sit there and be obscure now in this completely new, completely different world. Clearly we're all on the same side against whatever is doing this.

ALEX

And that right there is the assumption that I have to challenge.

BRYN

That...fine. Fine. You know the situation better than I do...

ALEX

Your family have briefed me about you in extensive detail Hamid. I need you to give me a detail of your past that someone couldn't fake. I don't care what. They've briefed me on most of the things that they think you would suggest. Our enemy has a tendency of sending back people we thought were dead only to have them then turn on us when we're happy to see them at the most.

BRYN

Ok well story from my childhood then?

ALEX

Curie takes a moment. Tell me of the time you broke your father's urn. You don't need to RP the whole thing because obviously it'll take a while. Do you do so accurately? Do you explain it? What do you do?

BRYN

Yeah. No, I'll...yeah. I'm willing to accept that that is a thing I have to do and therefore I will use it to establish my identity

ALEX

She presses you for surprisingly trivial details.

BRYN

That kind of makes sense to me, yeah

HELEN

Yeah. Azu's getting a little riled up so she's just gonna be like backing you up, I guess. Like you have an orc shadow.

ALEX

I have to ask one thing of you and I need you to understand that I've asked this of everyone. The fact that you're already meeting with me without someone else checking this is the largest courtesy I could offer you. I'm afraid I need you to take your clothes off Hamid for a moment.

BRYN

That surprises me. Ok. Why not. Yeah I take my clothes off

HELEN

Azu turns around

ALEX

She insists that you turn around once. Thank you for your patience. To explain there are some signs that we've learned to recognise where someone is in the late stages of turning, that's one of the ways that we've spotted. I have to ask the same of you Azu. I've been speaking with Fairhands. Is there anything...

HELEN

Yeah sure. She's getting it all off. She's just so fed up.

ALEX

Sure. I'll let you pick what story she asked of Fairhands and your family would you like to share

HELEN

Ooh

ALEX

She's spoken to them both.

HELEN

Azu tells them about who brought her to Aphrodite and what happened to them

ALEX

Cool. I'm not going to go into that for listeners because they can learn that themselves. I'm happy to brief Bryn since he hears it. Ooh. But knowing for a few listeners, that's fine. She accepts it. She also asks the same for the turnaround

HELEN

Yep

ALEX

Curie then does a peculiar thing...

BRYN

Presumably does the same with Ed!

(laughing)

ALEX

...she locks the door...Oh yeah! You know what, what is it with Ed? He just disappeared in my brain

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BRYN

Apparently so.

HELEN

Oh poor Ed

BRYN

New season

ALEX

Ed takes a moment and looks to Hamid like is this ok that this is being asked

BRYN

I give him a little nod

ALEX

Ok right, yeah. Ed's fine.

BRYN

I'll help him out of his armour. I'll probably have to help you out of your armour as well actually

HELEN

Oh god!

BRYN

Everything under it I will be a perfect gentleman but...

ALEX

So Curie has no information on Ed whatsoever and so asks you to basically vouch that he has been in your sight since you have known him

BRYN

Yes, yeah.

ALEX

Ok. Curie is then looking a little bit...she is a bit more wary of Ed than you two. She then, without saying a word, starts to tell Hamid of the time that basically the conversations that you had during Bertie's death as something that only you and the rest of the party were present for and also quickly shows herself...

HELEN

Oh my gosh!

ALEX

Yeah. Then she sits down. Squeamishness is a long time behind us.

BRYN

I...see. I guess we'll have to get used to some new social norms

ALEX

You'd rather this than the alternative I assure you.

BRYN

I can only assume you're...yes absolutely.

HELEN

Am I to understand that you wouldn't talk to us about Oscar Wilde. So that does that mean he's dead or gone...

ALEX

We can return to these things. I can talk about Oscar Wilde in reason. I'm not about to lay bare the entirety of an intelligence network that spans the globe. That's not exactly a wise...

HELEN

I'm only asking about one man. I didn't know him for long but he was useful. He was...

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ALEX

Wilde is currently his own agent to a degree.

BRYN

That's probably for the best I guess.

ALEX

He left the meritocracy before the meritocracy was compromised and as a result we have been in contact and providing certain information exchanges with him. Ultimately he is his own agent who we have been assisting. I am not going to tell you about what at this stage

BRYN

Very well. If...it's good to know that he's still alive

ALEX

I can however say that should our conversation prove fruitful I will be putting you in touch with him very soon

BRYN

Very well

ALEX

I'm gonna take a break on that weird low key vibe and then come back in a couple of minutes.

And welcome back. So you're sat with arguably the most well informed person on the planet. You don't have much time, they're very busy you see so pick your questions and pick them carefully

BRYN

Oh god Alex. I need to know everything. Both in and out of character!

HELEN

How do you need us...how can we help? How can we put this right?

ALEX

Curie takes a moment, looks at you appraisingly. I think at this stage given your previous history the best person that I can do is attach you back to Wilde. The work that you were doing prior to your disappearance is ongoing

BRYN

Is it related to what's happening?

ALEX

We are working under the assumption that it is.

BRYN

How? I don't see the connection

ALEX

The path which you all took from London via Paris and so on, at first that was the initial route that this problem seemed to have begun at.

BRYN

I mean we were following...

ALEX

Correlation is not causation

BRYN

Absolutely

ALEX

We did then take matters into our own hands when it became apparent that the meritocrats were not investigating the Simulacrum to the best of their abilities. The first thing that we did was start chasing down all of that paperwork that you had accumulated. We investigated as much of the research that you dug up as possible and we have noticed some marked correlations between, shall we say, the organic components that made up the Simulacra and the organic components that we should say have been infiltrating our compatriots in Europe and other parts of the world

BRYN

I've still got the notebook. Is this to do with the seed that's in it.

ALEX

As far as we can tell yes.

BRYN

Ok

ALEX

Now I was given to understand that as a result of your efforts Wilde was under the impression that some kind of device was being made in order to counteract the Simulacra.

BRYN

Yeah

ALEX

It is our greatest desire that that device might prove useful in our new current war, the problem being that we cannot find this device nor its builder anywhere.

BRYN

Oh

ALEX

We have tried and we have failed to track them down. As a result we are forced to a plan that I had abandoned assuming that the notebook was lost

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along with all the copies. It is my fondest hope that I can convince you to join Wilde, convince him to accept your help and for you to continue your research with the paperwork that you have in the vain hopes that we might be able to continue the creation of such a device and...

BRYN

Track down more information about the seed and track down, what did Grizzop call it, a fail safe?

HELEN

There was some sort of device. So wait, what happened to the Cult of Hephaestus? They were meant to be working on it.

ALEX

As far as I'm aware the cleric who was given the device swore adamantly that he had never heard of such a thing and when we pursued the matter he was taken underground by the rest of his church

BRYN

Oh

ALEX

However given his history and his character I have no reason to assume that he was acting maliciously unless of course he was compromised

HELEN

He probably made a promise to keep it secret

ALEX

Well that promise may have cost us an enormous amount. Of course I have to be perfectly clear with you. This is one avenue of investigation of countless. I have no promises that this would work but also you have managed to bring back, seemingly from the dead, a very early avenue of investigation which may still be pertinent

BRYN

If we can help we will. If that's how we can help, that's what we'll do. You said the meritocracy had been compromised. What...

ALEX

As far as we can tell Guivres has been taken.

HELEN

Taken hostage?

BRYN

Infected?

HELEN

Dead?

BRYN

Infected by the same process that...

ALEX

Exactly

BRYN

...controls the minds of others

ALEX

As it stands as far as our intelligence says – she takes a moment, looks around the rest of you – the rest of them may not be as in robust health as we might like in such a dire situation and so they are having to consider their actions more carefully than they had been previously want to.

BRYN

I know you obviously have strong feelings about their role...

ALEX

There's something worse than being proven right sometimes

BRYN

Are you...let's not cast accusations around. I still remember what happened in Prague, madam. Have you tried to reach out to them? Are you working with them or against them or merely disconnected from them?

ALEX

They have, shall we say, rebuffed our advances so far. What I would say is that the meritocratic forces are no longer your friends. They have been so heavily compromised this would be more of a hindrance than a help by this point. The churches have managed to hold themselves up better than most. They still claim that they have no way to formally detect whether someone has turned but at least they have additional tools at their disposal. Myself and the other Harlequins have been forced to step into a power vacuum that we would have once envied, in a situation that none of us desired.

BRYN

I see

ALEX

As it stands governance is starting to revert. Areas are taking matters into their own hands. We do the best that we can to stay on top of things.

BRYN

Where are the meritocrats? Einstein mentioned they were potentially meeting...having a complication in the Far East?

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ALEX

Correct

BRYN

That's still the latest?

ALEX

Yes

BRYN

What of Tesla? Are you in touch with him? They always told us he was a Separatist but we don't know if he was actually a Harlequin

ALEX

He was not.

BRYN

Interesting

HELEN

Is he now?

ALEX

Curie takes a moment and looks at Azu...

BRYN

I'm not sure the same labels matter so much anymore

ALEX

Also true. We have not yet been able to find Tesla. We have fairly reliable intelligence that said that he was in London at the time that London fell

BRYN

Oh. He came back from the New World?

ALEX

Correct. Which is less than convenient

BRYN

That's not good. No.

HELEN

Wait does that mean that he might have had something to do with it?

BRYN

Or even if he didn't he might be compromised

ALEX

And given his role in the Simulacrum. Again let us extend this hypothetical argument. Let us assume that the Simulacra are related to our current

opponents. Let us further assume that the creation of the Simulacra was, as I'm now given to believe by Tesla, not an accident. It follows that either...

BRYN

It seems clear to me that Tesla and this seems terribly in character, hadn't foreseen the consequences of his creation.

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ALEX

Did you ever meet Tesla?

BRYN

No but...

ALEX

You have quite the read on the man

BRYN

We spoke with his one time assistant, Liliana. She had the same blindness, they couldn't see that what they thought they were creating could easily be used for evil

ALEX

For what it's worth Tesla seemed to recognise it at the end

HELEN

Well too late

ALEX

Correct.

BRYN

I would not be surprised at all if he had accidentally laid the foundations of something terrible by researching in a way no one else had ever thought of

ALEX

I'm surprised you have not asked after the health of your family Hamid or you Azu

BRYN

Einstein said...

HELEN

Einstein said they were fine

ALEX

[Sighing]

HELEN

Are they not?

ALEX

No they are. He just shouldn't be...that's fine. Very well

HELEN

What do you mean?

BRYN

Should we...what...

ALEX

There's one way that I can know if you haven't turned.

HELEN

Well?

ALEX

It will be obvious to us in about seven days.

HELEN

What does *that* mean?

BRYN

The quarantine period...the blue marks

ALEX

Correct. Correct. At the moment everything I've told you has been an uncharacteristic leap of faith but Einstein's very much under the impression that you were all well out of it before things progressed

HELEN

We were

BRYN

I mean we've been gone for 18 months. I think that should be clear as soon as you meet my younger brother

HELEN

We were in a completely different dimension

ALEX

Which is why if all is well I'd like to pass you on to Wilde to continue your work if you're willing

BRYN

Do you need us to wait the seven days first?

HELEN

Are we in quarantine?

ALEX

Let's just say that Wilde is better at handling anyone who's turned than just about anyone we have these days

BRYN

Interesting

ALEX

He got very good at spotting turned meritocratic agents. Quite the eye for it, it would seem.

BRYN

Well good him I suppose

HELEN

He had a suspicion that something was wrong so a lot of time to hone that. So are we stuck here for a week?

ALEX

No

BRYN

I feel like I have a thousand more questions still about the world but I guess we'll have to figure that out. I do have another really important one though is the spell Eldarion cast that brought us back from the plane.

ALEX

Einstein gave me at best a cursory explanation. Go on.

BRYN

I mean I can give you a more detailed one but the question is...

HELEN

We lost two people

BRYN

It wasn't 100% successful. She stepped out. She left herself behind intentionally but two people slipped whilst we were between places. Where might they be? Is there any way we can find them? Get them back? If Grizzop is the one who commissioned the failsafe, having him...

ALEX

You're asking...how to put this...

HELEN

Are they gone?

ALEX

It would be better to assume so.

BRYN

[Sighing] Hamid is trying really hard not to cry

HELEN

Ok Azu puts an arm around you

ALEX

That's the best...the best case scenario and this may be the worst depending on your perspective, is they could be quite literally anywhere and when you know as much as I do about the nature of...

BRYN

The planes?

ALEX

Let's just say that anywhere is a very large and very empty place most of the time. This of course doesn't preclude the possibility that they could be somewhere habitable but I think it would be extremely foolish to assume so

HELEN

So not dead but dying slowly where we can't get them

BRYN

Is there a way to find out...

ALEX

It would take an enormous amount of research and resources which I'm afraid I cannot spare at this time

BRYN

I understand, they're only two people but they're...

ALEX

The sad fact is there's one person who I would've trusted to find them

BRYN

Eldarion

ALEX

Correct

BRYN

Of course

ALEX

She was always more concerned with the larger picture.

BRYN

I'm not giving up on them. Once the world is ever in a stable place again I'm going to look for them. Just so I know tell me how I start. Tell me now so I can start thinking about it. I promise I won't let it distract me from what's more important. From helping people here and now but I need to know where I start so that when I get the chance I can do it.

ALEX

In my line of work I've learned that leaps of faith are seldom as effective as arrangements of mutual self-interest. If you two are willing to continue your work with Wilde as you left it off, I'm sure it's advanced and you'll need bringing up to speed, I will help you do that. To be clear you will need access to quite literally the most skilled diviners that there are and they'll need...

BRYN

Madam it's not a trade. I'm going to help you anyway because it's right but thank you

ALEX

Then I will help you attempt to find your friends because it's right.

HELEN

Tell me the odds

BRYN

Never tell me the odds!

ALEX

Infinitesimal

BRYN

I walk up really close to Azu and again...this time I don't even grab your hand, I grab you around the waist and give you half a hug and just whisper – she didn't say zero

(laughing)

ALEX

Ohhh! I'm going to end the episode there. Oh, I end the episode there. Ah my heart broke. Urgh

HELEN

Good! This is your fault!

ALEX

Yeah I know! Oh god. Ah that's the worst thing I could ever imagine putting on a t-shirt with its context.

(laughing)

BRYN

She didn't say zero. Ow! Ow! You're right. Damn Alex. You cold.

ALEX

And a thousand shippers all cried out in pain at once. Right yep we will end the episode and we will pick up and I promise you it won't be misery the whole way but it's going to start that way

BRYN

Clearly!

ALEX

Yeah. Bye guys

EVERYONE

Bye!

[Show Theme - Outro]

ALEX

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