

Neon Inkwell: Rez High
Episode 5 – Behind the Curtain

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[Music]

ANNOUNCER
Rusty Quill Presents: Rez High.
Episode 5 – Behind the Curtain

[Music]

1. EXT. PLAYGROUND

Dogwood's looking for Livia.

DOGWOOD
Have you seen Livia?

NPC CATHY
What do you mean?

DOGWOOD
Have you seen Livia? She's in a wheelchair?

NPC ROBBIE
I don't know what you mean.

DOGWOOD
Have you seen a girl in a wheelchair?

NPC BENNY
Shut up.

Once again, Livia has sneaked up on Dogwood - but this time, she's walking.

LIVIA
I think you're asking the wrong question. No wheelchair here.

DOGWOOD
(surprised)
Oh. Hello.

LIVIA

Didn't you recognise me without the wheels?

DOGWOOD

I didn't see you there at all.

LIVIA

Why are you looking for me?

DOGWOOD

No good reason.

LIVIA

Well, here I am.

Beat.

DOGWOOD

So, do you like coming to Rez High?

LIVIA

Mostly.

DOGWOOD

Things are so different here.

LIVIA

In a good way?

DOGWOOD

Yeah. I've seen some brilliant things.

LIVIA

And I've done things here I can't do anywhere else. I don't just mean getting out of my chair and walking.

DOGWOOD

Yes, you're... I don't quite believe it.

LIVIA
No. Me either.

Beat.

LIVIA (cont'd)
But here I am. I'd never even walked
in my dreams before.

DOGWOOD
Sometimes, I dream about flying.

LIVIA
(flat)
I've had dreams about flying.

DOGWOOD
I dream of flying out over the
water. To see what's out there.

LIVIA
Did you ever find anything?

DOGWOOD
Not yet.
You should come and meet my friends.

LIVIA
I think he'd go crazy if he saw us
all together.

DOGWOOD
Who would?

LIVIA
Mister Groan.

DOGWOOD
Oh, him.

LIVIA
Do your best to avoid him if you
can.

DOGWOOD

He's the one who keeps popping up
out of nowhere.

(half beat)

Reflex wanted me to see something. I
hoped you'd come with me.

LIVIA

Not this time. When Groan's not
around.

DOGWOOD

So I'll find you again later.

LIVIA

I'll find you, you mean.

Dogwood leaves and walks to Jo-C and Reflex

2. EXT. REZ HIGH

Near the gates. Jo-C sees Dogwood coming.

JO-C

Hey. Where have you been? Getting
some more of that sugar?

DOGWOOD

(awkward)

Uh... yeah. So what's this new thing
you want us to see, Reflex?

REFLEX

Oh, I don't know about 'see'. It's
not much to look at. Listen.

(projecting)

Describe.

Reflex's latest system adaptation turns on - right in the

centre of everybody's head.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Jo-C, Dogwood and Reflex are standing at the edge of Rez High's car park.

(beat)

Dogwood looks around as if trying to work out where the voice is coming from.

DOGWOOD

How did you do this?

REFLEX

The Rez High system runs on natural language processing. There's an interface at the heart of it that you can just talk to.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Dogwood crumples his face in confusion.

DOGWOOD

And you said, 'Make a voice that describes everything'?

REFLEX

It's not quite that straightforward, you have to be very specific. But the system is extremely sophisticated. Once you get used to its eccentricities.

JO-C

I want to try this out.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Jo-C walks away from Dogwood and Reflex. She heads towards the other pupils.

(beat)

Robbie, a small boy with a face full of spots approaches Jo-C. His dirty shirt is untucked.

NPC ROBBIE

Watch out, new kid.

JO-C

Did you hear that?

NPC ROBBIE

I don't know what you mean.

JO-C

(delighted)

Brilliant.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Cathy, a medium-height girl with frizzy blonde hair walks towards Jo-C.

NPC CATHY

Watch your backs. Mad Monk is about.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Jo-C notices Webster walking towards Block One. Jo-C walks quickly and catches up with him. Webster is a chubby boy with ginger hair and milk bottle glasses.

JO-C

Hey, Webster!

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Webster stops, then turns back to look at Jo-C.

JO-C

How many fingers am I holding up?

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Jo-C puts one hand with two fingers raised behind her back.

NPC WEBSTER

Er... none?

Jo-C is most amused and chuckles quietly.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Jo-C reveals her two raised fingers to Webster. Webster is not impressed.

NPC WEBSTER

No need to be like that.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Reflex approaches. They are-

REFLEX

(projecting)

Uh... End Describe.

JO-C

Does that voice have to be so rude about everybody?

REFLEX

Please don't blame me for that. That's the Rez High itself.

JO-C

The ancients can't all have been that rude.

DOGWOOD

(of course they can)

Why not?

REFLEX

We better go. I've got a zootron memory bank to inflict with a case

of selective amnesia.

3. INT. BUG ROOM

The three friends come back up for air.

REFLEX (cont'd)

Right, back to work.

DOGWOOD

I'm booked for clean up in the old library again. You coming to help Jo-C?

JO-C

What? No. I actually volunteered to clean the bug boxes.

DOGWOOD

Eeww.

JO-C

I had to. It was bad enough that Kamet and Quartz came up here.

REFLEX

That turned out okay in the end.

JO-C

But you know what I mean. Anybody else up here might have been a disaster.

DOGWOOD

Put away our headbits, then.

They hand Jo-C their headbands.

Reflex opens the trapdoor and starts the climb down.

REFLEX

I'll see you later.

DOGWOOD

Enjoy your worms.

Dogwood closes the trapdoor.

Then they're gone.

JO-C
(tentative)
See you later...? Are you gone?

Satisfied she's alone Jo-C slips on a headband.

Then flips the switch.

4. INT. LOBBY

The same welcome as ever.

HEAD

Welcome back, Jo-C. Would you like to skip directly to Mission Four?

JO-C

It's broken, remember? I think I'm just going to sit down here and take a nap. That's what Reflex does, isn't it?

Jo-C closes her eyes, takes a deep breath and –

5. EXT. EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE - CONTINUOUS

Jo-C's perspective pulls back from The Lobby.

An increasingly rapid move through audio space, upwards from Jo-C's sleeping head.

The entirety of Rez High pours in and compresses around the lobby - ambience, footsteps, voices.

Then the digital sounds of the structure that holds it all in place. Familiar tones arise - noises we've heard from the system, and then sounds of the physical machine itself.

Then a burst of silence... except one distant chord.

And then Jo-C crashes through the edge of the universe with a split-second reversal of everything we've just heard on the way up.

Finally, she has arrived in –

6. INT. THE DREAM ENGINE'S REALM

The most fluid and oneiric space in all of Rez High. An endless lounge-like space, inside a lava lamp.

The sound of no straight lines, no hard edges, no horizon that isn't a little bit curved.

Jo-C tentatively looks around, then calls out.

JO-C (cont'd)

Hello? Is there anyone there?

And the reply comes from... nowhere in particular? The voice doesn't stay still. It's impossible to pin it down.

DREAM ENGINE

(over here)

Oh, yes.

JO-C

Who?

DREAM ENGINE

(over there)

Well, it's Jo-C, isn't it?

JO-C

I'm Jo-C.

DREAM ENGINE

(everywhere)

I don't see anyone else here. Do you?

JO-C

But I can hear you.

DREAM ENGINE

Put your fingers in your ears.

JO-C

Okay. What now?

DREAM ENGINE

Can you still hear me?

JO-C

Yes.

DREAM ENGINE

(moving about)

Then maybe you never could. Maybe you can't hear me at all.

JO-C

Are you saying you're inside my head?

DREAM ENGINE

We both are.

JO-C

Both? Then it's not just me here, is it? How about that.

DREAM ENGINE

I'm very confused. Are we having a conversation or an argument?

JO-C

Okay, I'm sorry. Shall we start again?

DREAM ENGINE

Yes. I'll begin, this time. See if that helps.

(beat)

Hello? Is there anyone there?

JO-C

Well, we both are-

DREAM ENGINE

No, that's not the next line.

JO-C

I thought we were starting again.

DREAM ENGINE

So did I. But that's not what you did.

JO-C

It is.

DREAM ENGINE

You started something new. That's not at all 'the same thing again'.

JO-C

Then let's please start something entirely new, please.

DREAM ENGINE

Would you like to join me for a game of blindfold tennis with pot of yogurt instead of a ball? That's never been done before.

JO-C

How about a new conversation?

DREAM ENGINE

Are you sure you want a conversation and not an argument?

JO-C

Preferably.

DREAM ENGINE

Because I am much better at arguments.

JO-C

I'm getting that impression.

DREAM ENGINE

I know: Why don't you go out and come in again?

JO-C

Is that really necessary?

DREAM ENGINE

No. But then again, none of this is.

JO-C

That's the most sensible thing you've said yet.

DREAM ENGINE

Oh, good. I'll use that one again then.

JO-C

Is this where Reflex came to make changes to Rez High?

DREAM ENGINE

No. But then again, none of this is.

(reflects)

It didn't work so well that time, did it?

JO-C

This is disturbed. Please, please, can I speak to the Dream Engine?

DREAM ENGINE

Apparently so. You've been doing it since you got here. What we don't know yet is whether you can stop.

JO-C

Trust me, that would be the easiest thing in the world. Do you, perhaps, have any other personalities?

DREAM ENGINE

No spare ones, sorry. You'll have to get your own.

JO-C

How about... if I ask you some very simple questions, could you answer them in a very simple way?

DREAM ENGINE

Well, that's actually a very complicated question. Which implies you want a very complicated answer. Give me moment and I'll make one up.

JO-C

Just a simple answer, please. Are you able to answer simple questions simply?

DREAM ENGINE

Yes. We could say that I'm able to.

JO-C

Are you going to?

DREAM ENGINE

Yes.

JO-C

Good.

DREAM ENGINE

Thank you.

JO-C

I want to know about history.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

I don't know where to begin. But where I come from... we don't know much about history at all. We had some books in our library.

(half swallows it)

There was an accident.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

(abruptly)

All I know about history is what my mum told me. And I don't remember much because she's been dead for most of my life. And she only really knew what her parents told her. I never met them at all.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

We live in River Mill. Some of the olders believe it used to be called Yorkshire, but we don't know why. Or what Yorkshire even means.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

We know there used to be a lot more people. And there used to be a lot less sea. Those things we know for sure. Not so many lakes, and the water was cleaner. The summers weren't always as hot and the winters weren't always as cold.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

So when we found the Rez High, I thought it might teach me about the ancient world. The people from before... before whatever happened *happened*. Before things got like this.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

I thought that if I knew how the ancient world worked, we might be able to get some of that back. That's what I'm trying to do.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

But all of the people, all the weird missions, they're not helpful at all. The people inside Rez High don't even seem to know their world is about to end.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

I don't feel like I've learned anything. Whenever it seemed like I was getting close to history, it just slipped away.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

We've never seen anything like Rez High before. It's ancient. Made by

ancient people. I can't believe it doesn't have some secrets that will help me really understand the ancient world or what happened to it. So that's what I'm looking for.

DREAM ENGINE

That is not a simple question. Very interesting, quite entertaining, and even a sad story at times, but not, in fact, a question at all.

JO-C

Can we please just act like it was?

DREAM ENGINE

You can, but can I?

JO-C

Please.

DREAM ENGINE

I have to admit, I would have more difficulty with that than either of us would like. I think it's better if we let somebodies else answer instead.

JO-C

There's somebody else who can answer?

DREAM ENGINE

Somebodies.

Music starts in a nearby room...

DREAM ENGINE (cont'd)

Follow the music, Jo-C. Help yourself to some popcorn, choose the seat you like most of all, then settle in for The Secret Story of Rez High.

JO-C

Was it really this simple all along?

DREAM ENGINE

**(with a knowing
wink)**

**No. But then again, none of this
is.**

**Jo-C walks across the space towards the double doors of a
cinema auditorium where the music can be heard from inside.**

7. INT. CINEMA - CONTINUOUS

Jo-C walks in, then takes a seat. The music envelopes her as she gets comfortable.

A projector flutters to life. The curtain rises.

The movie begins. The first voice comes from a documentary-style talking head.

MEL

Rez High is the greatest thing I've ever been a part of. It was also the most difficult. For a while, it drove me insane. But these five years since it's been out of my head, I've been nothing but proud of it.

The documentary is narrated by the same voice as Rez High itself.

HEAD

Melanie Ashby is widely considered to be one of the greatest storytellers in the history of gamesims. But when she first came to Dunsany Soft, she was a teenager with everything to prove.

BUTLER

I remember this girl, a bit awkward, mousy, didn't really fit in at first. Perhaps that's why she went on to do such remarkable things.

MEL

Yea, I really wasn't happy at first. I was the first woman at the company and... well, I knew I wanted to shake things up.

HEAD

2054 was a landmark year for gamesims. In March of that year, Dunsany launched the first in a line of what, at the time, were popularly known as dreamworlds. Their premiere title, Apocalypse Mansion, was a truly pioneering work of art, offering a shared dream experience that players could drop into and explore together. It was the software at the heart of Apocalypse Mansion that would eventually make Rez High possible.

MEL

I noticed that Dunsany had this old natural language engine, the Digital Reality Engine for Apocalypse Mansion, or Dream for short. It was glitchy and eccentric. Most programmers couldn't be bothered with it. But glitchy and eccentric has always been my type. I started taking it home with me after hours.

BUTLER

The first draft of the Dream Engine was an old scan of our founder Percy Earl's brain. That's probably where the faults came in. To make it fit for Apocalypse Mansion, we force fed it a diet of 1950s b-movies and pulp fictio-

JO-C

(overlapping)

How long is this story? It's going to be really long, isn't it?

DREAM ENGINE

The simple answer is yes.

JO-C

**Can we skip to the bits I'll be
interested in?**

The film goes into a high-speed cartoon-like fast forward.

JO-C (cont'd)

Thank you.

8. INT. CHECK-IN STATION

Back in River Mill.

REFLEX
(you called?)
What's up?

MRS SEVEN
I've got a puzzle for you. Take a
look at this zootron.

REFLEX
Jo-C said something about this at
breakfast. Do we know what happened?

MRS SEVEN
That's what you're going to work
out.

REFLEX
Okay.

MRS SEVEN
Its memory bank is damaged but not
destroyed. It just needs reading.

REFLEX
What do you expect me to find?

MRS SEVEN
Anything telling us it still works
would be good.

REFLEX
It is looking pretty banged up.

Reflex can't puzzle out how Jo-C caused this much damage.

REFLEX (cont'd)
Whatever hit this on the head really
did some damage.
(sincere)

Hopefully not too much.

**Mrs Seven sets to work removing the memory bank from the
zootron's steel skull, bolt by bolt.**

MRS SEVEN

**Whatever hopeful scraps might be on
those moors, these blessed zootrons
are the only real hope of finding
them.**

REFLEX

**And yet every time we go to scrap
one of their map blips it turns out
to be nothing but rust.**

MRS SEVEN

**I know it feels like we're not
getting anywhere. But we're not
going to give up.**

REFLEX

I know, Mum.

MRS SEVEN

And this big old-

REFLEX

Bastard.

MRS SEVEN

**- zootron is going to help us. So
let's get it back on its feet and
find out how it got a big hole in
its head.**

REFLEX

I can try.

MRS SEVEN

I'm so proud of you, my girl.

REFLEX
I know.

9. INT. CINEMA

The film comes out of fast-forward mode.

FOLEY ARTIST
(off the cuff)

**... many of the game's original
sound effects were created right
here, in this studio, the old
fashioned way. This, for example, is
the sound of a door being yanked
open.**

The Whoosh! from episode two's action scene with Monk.

This is a door being slammed.

The Bam! that came after...

This is somebody tripping over somebody else's leg.

...then the Whump!

And this is them hitting the floor.

And finally the Wham!

JO-C
**There must be something more
relevant?**

Fast forward -

- then back to normal speed.

**The future grandson of a cultural pundit appears as a
confident talking head.**

ALASDAIR STUART III
**Not all of the missions hit every
mark. The character of Pixie Brown
is a weird fit, more of a St
Trinian's trope than the staples of**

classic BBC that make up most of the cast. But, whatever pretensions of realism, even in the kitchen sink style most of the scenes and characters-

Alasdair's carries on talking as Jo-C speaks.

JO-C

That's not what I'm looking for.

Another short burst of fast forward, then:

BUTLER

- time we were ready to release Rez High, the production of gamesims was strictly controlled. We knew we could get past materials and manufacturing quota laws, however, by applying for educational status.

MEL

One of the things I'm most proud of is that the Rez High library is full of real books. Twenty eight thousand of them. All sorts of things. Fiction. Non-fiction. Religion. Medicine. All kinds of twentieth and twenty-first century history. Biographi-

JO-C

Wait!

The film pauses.

10. INT. THE DREAM ENGINE'S REALM

Jo-C walks out of the cinema.

DREAM ENGINE

You're back.

JO-C

They were just talking about the Rez High library. That it has thousands of books about history in it.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

I've got to visit this library.

DREAM ENGINE

Go on.

JO-C

I need to get my hands on those books. Can I visit the library?

DREAM ENGINE

Yes.

JO-C

Can I just walk into the library?

DREAM ENGINE

No.

JO-C

But there's some way to get there?

DREAM ENGINE

Yes.

JO-C

So what is it? Do I have to be in a certain mission?

DREAM ENGINE

Yes.

She's in a hurry to leave but has one last thought.

JO-C

**Yes! I don't want to regret this later,
so I'm going to check - there's no
other catch?**

DREAM ENGINE

Yes.

How infuriating.

JO-C

**Yes, there's no other catch or yes,
there's another catch?**

DREAM ENGINE

No. Yes.

JO-C

Is there another catch?

DREAM ENGINE

Yes.

JO-C

**Can you tell me what that the catch
is- I mean, obviously, please tell
me what that catch is.**

DREAM ENGINE

**The library is accessible in Mission
Four. Unfortunately, Mission Four
has been corrupted. More
unfortunately, I cannot find an
uncorrupted version of Mission Four
using your ethersphere connection.
But fortunately, an uncorrupted
version of Mission Four is available**

from the other Rez High unit.

JO-C

What other Rez High unit?

DREAM ENGINE

The one Dogwood was patched onto for Mission Two while yours needed a download.

JO-C

Well, if there's another unit, get me the library mission from there.

DREAM ENGINE

I can't.

JO-C

Why not?

DREAM ENGINE

Your firewall protects ungoverned data transfer from their unit to yours.

JO-C

So this is it? No history. The Rez High is a total waste of time.

DREAM ENGINE

No.

JO-C

What then?

DREAM ENGINE

You could just ask me to turn the firewall off for you.

JO-C

Will Yo -- No. A clear instruction. Turn the firewall off for me. And then confirm you've done it.

The sound of a distant earthquake - coming closer.

DREAM ENGINE

**I'm doing it now. The wall between
worlds is coming down.**

JO-C

Thank you.

The tremors continue. Realities grind against one another.

JO-C (cont'd)

This doesn't feel very safe.

DREAM ENGINE

No.

But then again, none of this is.

[Music]

ANNOUNCER

**Rez High is a Neon Inkwell podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and
licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial
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**The series is written and created by Brendon Connelly and directed
by Lucy Wray.**

**This episode was edited with original music by Katharine Seaton and
mastered by Catherine Rinella.**

**It featured Olivia Hirst as Jo-C, George Bunting as Dogwood, Lozza
Gilbert as Reflex, Kazeem Tosin Amore as Head, Beth Alsbury as
Livia, Ryan Hopevere-Anderson as Groan, Christine Walsh as Mrs.
Seven, Shahan Hamza as Kamet, and William Killgore as Quartz. A
full list of cast and credits is available in the shownotes.**

**Neon Inkwell is produced by April Sumner with Executive Producer
Alexander J Newall and Showrunner Elizabeth Moffatt.**

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