Hello and welcome delegates to episode 8 of the DG. Last time a whole load of deaths darkened our doorway, with GC, Kerensky and perhaps Chaim Weizmann kicking the bucket all in the space of a single episode. This episode promises to contain less murder, but still an awful lot of conspiracy to commit to murder nonetheless. We have had a very productive week as well, as our alternative TOV continues to expand with several resolutions successfully passed in our voting booth. Where there has been success, there has also been an incredible amount of controversy. The Italians, it would seem, have left the building, as everyone’s favourite meme-makers BF managed to get himself caught up in a grand conspiracy, and was subsequently thrown in prison. As a protest, VO made an angry statement to the press, bailed his comrade out of jail, and returned home to Rome. Absolving himself of any association with his leader, Fidel has now thrown his lot in with the Zionist delegation, which would be a much more effective gesture if its de facto leader Chaim Weizmann was still around.

Nobody has seen heads or tails of Weizmann in weeks, but it was the discovery of AK’s body in the River Seine, only a stone’s throw from the HZ, that truly sent the doomsayers over the edge. The Big three, which now consists of WW, LG and AC, supported by RM, was feeling particularly gloomy at the end of last week’s instalment, but in the meantime, they managed to make a critically important policy decision. The allies, in league with the accredited German delegates, determined at some point last week to actually commit to a proper organised campaign to crush Bolshevism in Russia. This firm decision was objected to by LG, and WW wasn’t so sure either, but in the mood of anti-Bolshevik opinion which surged following the discovery of Kerensky’s body, and the mysterious assassination of GC which had yet to be cleared, the tired soldiers of Europe were apparently more willing than one may have expected to venture boldly into Russia’s divided wastes.

This time, they would be supported by a contingent of Germans – if a concerted invasion of Russia’s Bolshevik centre was to take place, the allies would need the Germans help. This act of coordinating an international military force comprised of enemies and allies demonstrated how seriously the world was taking the Bolshevik threat, but as a result of this initiative, we have an important task in store for all delegates today, rather than a brand new vote, so stay tuned for details on that. We have in fact had another new delegate sign up this week, but James has yet to send me the details of his avatar yet, so he’ll have to wait till next week. Similarly, the delegate known as Lilithia also has yet to send me their details, so please do that soonish both of you, and all being well, we’ll have two new actors in play by the time of next week’s episode. As far as I’m aware, that’s all the housekeeping we need to tackle for this week’s episode, so without any further ado, I will now take delegates everywhere to an eerily familiar scene, where death hung ominously in the air…

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Dmitri Rabotnik was tired. He was tired of answering questions with so little information. He was tired of walking aimlessly around Paris. He was tired of worrying about the future of Russia if it were controlled by such malignant forces as the Bolsheviks. He was tired of WW’s arrogant proselytising. He was tired of having to keep bribing and bargaining his way into the important circles. He was tired of thinking about the dead, frozen face which Alexander Kerensky presented to the world, after God only knows how long submerged in the River Seine. Most of all though, Dmitri Rabotnik was just really, really tired. A mass exodus of Russia’s administrative staff in the aftermath of Kerensky’s disappearance and subsequent re-appearance had shattered the nerves of most of Rabotnik’s friends, but it also meant that he, as well as these friends, were given more work to do in addition to that personable, diplomatic work he already had.

As the sole representative of a free Russia, Rabotnik was beset by visitors looking for information, yet he never seemed able to get any successful appointments with those allied VIPs. He walked now, at 1AM on the evening of 20th March, towards the people who supposedly would be able to grant this help. In the last week, he had expended all of his energies in wresting a promise from the powers to intervene with force and intention in Red Russia. By ridding the centre of the country of its Bolshevik virus, his beloved homeland might be free to choose its own destiny. As he walked in the deserted streets of Paris, rubbish and old newspapers were blown around him. The city seemed on the one level to be falling apart – it was like a representative of the people that lived in it, it was as though the city could feel their pain. It seemed to creak and groan under the anxiety which the shower of death and anguish had brought into everyone’s body and mind. He had heard several stories in the last week, though he could not believe it, of a suggestion which would have brought the whole darned conference to NY.

Rabotnik was both sad and pleased that the proposal never made it past the suggestion stage – imagine doing to NY what they were currently doing to Paris? It was enough to wreck one great city with their intrigues, with their lies, with their destructive plans. Who knows what manner of evil might be perpetrated in a less culture place? The wind howled around him, and Rabotnik pulled his jacket collar up. Winter was unwilling to leave the city, just as the smell of death had clung on till the last moment. These nights there was little to do but drink with his fellow delegates in the hope that, for a moment, the worst aspects of the situation could be forgotten. He had never expected so much death at such a civilised conference. At 6.5, he was often subject to stern or curious looks, but as matters became more acute in Paris, Rabotnik almost began to feel like people were watching him because they expected him to do something terrible. The logic of the last few weeks had taught Parisians that if something awful could happen, then it would happen, and what could be more awful than a hulking, 6.5 bearded Russian going on a rampage? Rabotnik shuddered to think of it, but the atmosphere had at least brought the delegates closer together.

The old exile of the Poles had been virtually forgotten, and Pawel Lebowa’s indiscretions forgiven. Dmitri Rabotnik remembered earlier in the week, how he and the Polish delegates PL, BK and Paderewski met on Wednesday night for a quiet drink. When Rabotnik had innocently asked where Josef Pilsudski had gone to, BK excused himself, it transpired, to weep in solitude, as Paderewski explained. Pilsudski had suffered something of a breakdown due to the stress and fear inherent in his position, and after recovering some of his faculties, had been permitted to return home. BK confessed that he did not know if his good friend would ever be the same again, and in response PL had proposed a toast to friends lost too soon, whereupon everyone recalled the tragic case of Frederick Bronski. Before long, what had been meant as a quiet, brief drink became an exercise in prolonged, pained expressions of sorrow and gloom. It had torn out Rabotnik’s heart to see an artist like Paderewski so sad. Not until Poland was free, Paderewski exclaimed, would he ever play again – that had been his avowed declaration since the GW had begun. Now though, Paderewski claimed he felt compelled to play because it kept the one candle of light still burning in his life. Without his music, Paderewski confessed, flicking his hand for dramatic effect, he would have turned to the absinthe like the late Bronski.

The next morning had brought only a hangover for Rabotnik, and not much else. The Poles, depressed and still somewhat isolated though they were, proved hesitant to openly side with a Russian delegate, as Rabotnik had urged. With the Germans in place on the C12, Rabotnik had hoped to get a seat for White Russia as well. Failing that, the second best option was to wrest approval from the allies for a proper concentrated campaign of destruction to be waged against the Reds. With the Bolsheviks liquidated and Lenin’s head on a spike, Rabotnik confessed he would feel better, but he wasn’t even truly sure that that was the case. He barely recognised himself any more, and judging by the darkness in the Polish eyes, he was far from the only delegate to have been scarred by their experience. And he had only arrived a little over a week ago – how could those that arrived on the first day still be in one piece! How indeed, but he was about to meet some of these figures now. It was late in the evening, as they had requested – Rabotnik checked his pocket-watch again, a gift from his late father, presumably dead now, killed on his country estate by the monstrous reds. Rabotnik sighed deeply and glanced straight ahead – this was the place. Perhaps the Germans would be able to offer him some sense of perspective or comfort. At the very least, stepping inside to meet with them would take him off these haunting streets for another few hours.

It was an intimidating scene for sure, and Rabotnik would probably have hesitated more had he not been so numbed to the situation. He ducked his head under the doorway, and as he entered the room he saw the eyes of the Austrian Chancellor widen. Karl Renner had seen him before, but evidently he had forgotten just how tall Rabotnik was. HVH and PVLV were less amused, focused as they were on a map laid out of the table. The room Rabotnik had just walked into was essentially the lounge of a pub, minus the patrons or bartender. A lonely glass of whiskey was cradled in the hands of the Japanese FM, Baron Makino Nabuaki, who seemed content to watch and say very little as the two Germans poured over the map in front of them. ‘Gentlemen’, Karl Renner said, rising to his feet, ‘Our Russian friend has arrived.’ With that, HVH, VLV and MN all rose up, with Nabuaki making a short bow before sitting back down.

‘You are welcome, Herr Rabotnik’, said VLV with a smile that was almost disarming, ‘we were just talking about you – well actually, about your country.’ Sur enough, the map was of Russia, or more specifically, of Siberia and the town of Omsk, where Alexander Kolchak was preparing for a new offensive into Bolshevik territory. ‘What do you think, Dmitri’, HVH asked, in an unusual display of familiarity and friendliness, ‘should we support Kolchak with a direct intervention alongside him, or should we move to invade on a different front, perhaps over land through Poland?’ Rabotnik thought carefully before adding his two cents. As he walked closer to the four men, who were now seated again, Chancellor Renner handed him a cigarette. ‘I believe our mission is relatively simple’, Rabotnik began.

We must ensure that Kolchak is successful, and the best way to achieve such an end is by distracting and dividing the attentions of the Bolsheviks. I believe that we should make use of the bridgehead already established in the Baltic by the brave German freedom fighters under the Freikorps banner, and capture St Petersburg. From there, with its access to the sea severed, it will be much easier to starve the Bolsheviks out.

HVH looked at VLV, who nodded in agreement. ‘Very good, Herr Rabotnik, this was also suggested by our associates in the C12 as the best strategy for containing Bolshevism. Tell me, have you heard from Herr Lebowa? I believe it was his intention last week to venture into Russia and meet with the Bolsheviks directly.’ ‘I believe, General’ Rabotnik began, ‘that Mr Lebowa determined to cancel or at least postpone his trip to Russia, owing to these recent developments in allied policy.’ ‘I see’, VLV sighed, ‘so this means the Polish delegation will not be thinning out any further then? Perhaps this is good. In the C12 we are in agreement as well. It took some time but LG has finally been brought around, as the Empire has agreed to commit a large proportion of the troops needed for the campaign.’ ‘Tell him about our Eastern arrangements, General’, Karl Renner piped up. VLV nodded in acknowledgement. ‘Indeed, Herr Rabotnik, it seems that our diplomats have managed to wrest additional agreements above and beyond our initial expectations, to the great relief of us all. Bolshevism has apparently scared enemies and friends alike into supporting this predominantly German push into Russia. The clear expectation is that we will relinquish our control of the control to a democratic committee once we seize Moscow.’

Rabotnik found himself intervening, almost without even realising it. ‘Herr General, I hope I am misunderstanding your language, forgive me for my German has never been sublime, but you do intend to honour these expectations, do you not? It would be a terrible tragedy indeed if my people were subjected to domination not by a ruinous ideology such as Bolshevism, but by foreign soldiers instead.’ ‘Oh of course, Herr Rabotnik’, VLV smiled, before adding:

Germany has no designs on your homeland. We wish merely to prop up a stable regime there which will not menace our interests. As soon as this is arranged, with allied support of course, we will withdraw our soldiers. I am sure you have heard, Herr Rabotnik, that I was selected first to command this multinational force. Apparently Herr Pilsudski’s nerves were destroyed by recent events, poor fellow. I understand you are quite familiar with the Poles now. I assume they are in agreement as to this strategy?

‘They are, General, and they wish to commit a large contingent of their own to secure Poland’s borders against attack by the Bolsheviks. They also seek guarantees that neither the new Russian regime nor the present German one will attempt to undermine Poland’s sovereignty.’ At this point HVH intervened. ‘There is much indeed still to be done, Herr Rabotnik. I believe that in the next week our delegates should work across the board to arrive at some solution for this Russian campaign, lest it crumbles before it gets off the ground. The Poles may still need convincing that the act of marching through portions of their territory will not be used as an opportunity to take liberties with Poland’s right to exist. Perhaps a document testifying to this effect, signed by all delegates, will do the job?’ ‘That would work wonders for Polish nerves, Herr von Hotzendorff’, Rabotnik replied. ‘I have myself been appointed as something of a go-between since…well…you know.’ Rabotnik found his voice trailing off. ‘Yes, my friend, please do accept Germany’s utmost sympathies in the matter of Kerensky’s tragic demise. We wish to assist your investigation in any way possible.’ Karl Renner then intervened.

I believe the investigation is being conducted by French police. They insist on maintaining control over the investigation even though the White Russians are desperate to have a final say themselves. Crazy times we live in where a statesman will be killed simply for doing his job. Kerensky was at one point our enemy, but no figure deserves to suffer such a fate.

Rabotnik nodded in agreement, and finally lit his cigarette, taking a deep drag and breathing in and out several times. It was, his physician told him, how Indians relax in the evenings. HVH and PVLV began muttering to one another, and MN suddenly stood up to speak. ‘Gentlemen’, he said in French, ‘I leave you now for the C12. I trust that we see eye to eye on the question of the exchanging of territory?’ Rabotnik could feel the two Germans wince, as Nabuaki left the room. Rabotnik was afraid to ask, but he did anyway. ‘Gentlemen, exactly what portions of Russia have you promised the Japanese FM? Who gave you such power?’ ‘Fret not, Herr Rabotnik’, exclaimed HVH, ‘the Baron refers merely to the exchange of territory from Germany’s colonial establishment on the Shantung peninsula to Japan. In return, Nabuaki has promised us extensive trading rights in the region, as well as in Siam.’ ‘In…Siam?’ Rabotnik was as confused as he was relieved. ‘Correct, Herr Rabotnik’, VLV replied, ‘Japan and Siam have been working closely with one another throughout the conference, and Baron Nabuaki assured us that Prince Charoon would be persuaded to join a limited free trade agreement with Germany in the Pacific.’ ‘I see’, Rabotnik replied. ‘And when is this C12 meeting?’ Karl Renner was about to answer, before thinking better of it, and glancing at his watch. His eyes widened once again. ‘Well’, Renner said, ‘we have to be there in three hours. Better get some sleep.’

Rabotnik knew he’d get little in the way of sleep that night, or should that be, morning? On his way back to the HZ, he couldn’t help but marvel at the industriousness of the German delegates. There was, in practical terms, no need to meet with him in secret at this dive in the middle of the night. Yet, such was the rarity of secrets in Paris, and certainly within the HZ, that such actions were believed worthwhile. The more secrets one had, the more information and thus the more leverage. Rabotnik knew that he would need all the help he could get, but just as surely as the Germans did not trust the allies yet to reveal all of their itinerary with them, Rabotnik felt a shiver run down his very long spine as he walked. There was something intrinsically within him that was urging him, no matter what he did, to not trust the Germans.

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It was an outrage, and that was that. Italy’s honour had been maligned, the name of her statesmen trampled underfoot, and why? Because some two-bit diplomat supposedly had evidence of some kind of conspiracy. The whole thing was ludicrous, and was yet another example of the kind of fiascos which Italy had to put up with on a regular basis. Still, if one positive could be drawn from the dire past week, it was that VO was at least able now to relax at home for a few days, until the allies realised that they needed their Italian friend to continue developing this new world order. Orlando re-read his press release one last time. He needed it to be punchy, but also detailed and concise, so that the full extent of the injustice was clear from the beginning.

Orlando found that he was still fuming over the barbaric way in which justice was meted out in Paris. He had been forced to bail out Signor Fidel with his own money, as the charges were proclaimed to have some weighting, and the evidence was believed to be present. Signor Fidel, exclaimed the allies, was a dangerous man. Orlando had never heard something so ridiculous. Fidel was as docile as his house cat, and while he may have schemed more than most, such activities were not against the law. Fidel claimed, and Orlando found that he was inclined to agree, that it was awfully convenient that such evidence materialised just at the moment when Fidel had become general secretary. These issues and more were expressed in Orlando’s statement, which he hoped would soon be communicated throughout Europe. The bottom line was, Paris was no longer safe, or reasonable or fair, and until it was made so, he did not feel willing to risk his person there. Better that he communicate via telegram instead. Perhaps this was to be the first of many communiques then; either way, the statement was ready to be sent off. The Italian premier’s statement read:

Today, Italy has taken the extraordinary step of withdrawing from the Paris Peace Conference. Recent events – the deaths of delegates from France, Canada, Poland, Hungary and Russia – have made the conference rightly security conscious. One or more killers remain on the loose. No delegate now feels safe. France's new prime minister wisely took steps to introduce enhanced security protocols to the conference to present further mutilation of the peace conference. Yet delegates from the new world blithely misplace their weapons, while others openly carry side-arms, claiming their own protection trumps collective security. The French do nothing about this. To compound matters, France's prime minister Monsieur Claveille, has naively politicised security arrangements – making himself police, judge and jury in all matters relating to security. While delegates understand that the conference takes place on French soil – and rightly so given Frenchmen's valiant efforts to thwart the advancing Hun – this does not give the prime minister the right to withhold norms of law. The moves by the prime minister follow the incarceration of an Italian delegate…The clear lack of legal case against Signor Fidel has added weight to the case against the French government in over-reaching itself in matters of security. Sadly, delegates at the peace conference have been duped into supporting M. Claveille's spectacularly misguided proposals. M Claveille's proposals passed after – and it cannot be overstated – the arrest of the existing General Secretary of the conference, one Bonifacio Fidel. Italy acted quickly to gather support for sensible amendments to the security policy, yet these efforts failed - in large part due to the Embassy having to split its efforts between the conference and identifying the whereabouts and status of our incarcerated delegate. The lack of a general secretary can be directly implicated in the failure to support our sensible revisions. This failure of the diplomatic process leaves Italy with no option but to lodge a formal protest over the treatment of Signor Fidel and to withdraw from the conference until it can be sure that its delegates can operate securely and free from politically-driven interference from the state authorities of the French Republic…Further, Italy will co-operate with any legitimate police operations to identify the un-apprehended killers. The current armistice was won at too great a cost for this peace to fail on grounds that can be so easily resolved with negotiation. I urge the French government and all delegates at the conference to act in accordance with international norms of law. Italy looks forward to restarting the peace process and enshrining the hard-won gains of the blood of our sons in a binding international treaty.

At that point, Orlando then penned in several amendments to the Security Protocols for the HZ, a recently approved resolution. Orlando had to admit that he had been impressed with the progress of the delegates during the week – they had released an anti-Bolshevik declaration, which served as a proto-manifesto directed against Bolshevik Russia. A worthwhile resolution calling for the removal of land and sea mines was then passed, as was another resolution aimed at fixing the borders of Africa. Orlando confessed that he been content with most of these, but the serious lack of security measures in the HZ could not go ignored any longer. Suppose that ridiculous scheme which Signor Fidel had been charged with hatching had taken place. Orlando still marvelled at the far-fetched nature of the scheme, whereby Fidel would somehow arrange for the attempted assassination of the British and American leaders, only to blame their misfortune on the Bolsheviks. It was so plainly impossible that Orlando wasn’t sure how anyone had had the courage to imagine it, and then to accuse a man of dignity like Signor Fidel of conducting it.

He was certain that those two Brits, Fitzwilliam and Tancred, were involved. Wherever a foolhardy scheme or impractical joke resided, so too did their influence. Perhaps it had been a Commonwealth scheme? Engineered to discredit Italy, and remove Orlando from the Conference too? On one occasion he had overheard Louis Botha, the SA delegate, refer to the Italian government as a collection of pansies, and to Italy itself as ‘all boot, no shoe’. Orlando wasn’t sure what Botha had meant, or if even Botha knew what he had meant when he said it, but the tone spoke for itself. The CA premier, Sir Robert Borden, had laughed at the joke of course, a whisky in one hand and a glass of bitters in the other. Perhaps he should start a rumour regarding the man’s drinking habits? It had been the final straw when Orlando had attempted, on the Monday evening when everything had kicked off with the arrest of Signor Fidel, to meet with the Empire delegates away from the watchful eyes of LG, or the two British delegates.

A statement of common purpose was all Orlando had been looking for – essentially a character reference, to the effect that Mr Fidel could never have done what he was accused of. Yet, Orlando found not men, but opportunists shamefully band-wagoning at Fidel’s expense. David McKay and Arthur McColville had been especially confrontational in that brief meeting, exclaiming their firm belief that Fidel was guilty as charged, and that he had long been the problem child of the Conference. Orlando had been too exasperated to even speak. He stormed out of the meeting in a rage, loudly lambasting the very institution of the British Empire, as David McCay looked on, horrified, with his hand over his patriotic mouth. McCollville had had to steady him, for he had never heard such a candid expression of criticism be directed at his beloved Empire before. Orlando felt it pathetic, but he was more frustrated that the meeting had produced nothing of use. Now he was reduced to waiting for the allies to call on him, and with the Germans already taking up plenty of time, there was no reason to suspect that his presence would even be needed. If they intended to let Italy stew in her juices, then Orlando promised himself that he could take the heat.

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WW rubbed his temples and sighed. TR had a way with words, but he also had a way with using more words than was ever necessary. The room was filled, according to House, with hostile Americans wearing friendly masks, but Wilson was doing his best to appear receptive. It was no use, plainly, to spurn all contact with his rival, so long as the passage of the LON and the political support for the final treaty depended so heavily upon the public backing of the former President. It was his other lesser deputies that Wilson found he really could not stand. He was now six minutes late for a C12 meeting in the French FM’s apartment at the Quai d’Orsay. Roosevelt seemed to be on a mission to give each of his cronies some airtime, while Walter Cameron, the sometimes shaky but well-meaning intermediary, watched in what seemed like a contented silence. Roosevelt was doing his best to present a united Republican front to the President, and he didn’t want Cameron’s Wilsonian sentiments getting in the way of that.

It seemed that all of his speakers had something they wished to emphasise; for Bruce Pug, it was the business interests which would be affected if America continued to maintain a presence in Europe after the peace treaty. For WR Hearst, it was the negative impact which rival newspaper corporations were having on his profits, thanks to their support of Wilson’s case. Hearst wanted Wilson to do something, to help blunt some of the sharpness of their editorials, so that Hearst would be able to carry on with no hurt feelings. Wilson resented Hearst’s willingness to sling mud, when he found it so hard to endure the mudslinging himself. Then there was Oliver Flanagan, who cared, it seemed, like nothing in the world the way he cared about oil. A bloviating, self-interested windbag if there ever was one. What did it matter how expensive or accessible oil was when Germans were starving and teetering on the edge of the abyss? Oh, and there was time for expressions of sympathy towards the Germans too, as Joseph Zahn reminded Wilson of his German roots for the umpteenth time, and proclaimed his profound wish to see America and Germany, two great nations, united in common friendship, without suggesting how this might be achieved.

House had been right – Oliver Flanagan was out to get him. That had perhaps been a touch dramatic, but Flanagan definitely was no fan of his fellow Texan. They used to joke that if he failed to mention Harvard or oil within three sentences, then Oliver Flanagan was probably ill, but as he watched him speak – Flanagan was the final speaker today, Roosevelt had promised – it began to dawn on Wilson, the full extent of the strain of the last few weeks. House had sold the idea of cooperation with the Republicans and with Roosevelt and company as means to get the majority of what he wanted, with the added benefit of being able to share the burden between likeminded, useful allies. The keyword being useful, as House reminded Wilson constantly how useless his candidates had been so far.

Despite the grand idea of sharing the load though, Wilson found he was even more exhausted then he had imagined – the act of sharing the load with political animals like Roosevelt came with the constant exercise of always having to look over his shoulder, always having to double check his intentions, always having to watch what he said. This act which he was forced to put up at all times, of being contented with what had been achieved, when he was in fact bitterly disappointed and so resentful towards the American political establishment, and in some ways the people as well, were weights that dragged him down. Wilson had been feeling under the weather for some time, but sheer shock of being with Clemenceau at one moment, of vising the recovering premier in his room, only to attend his funeral 48 hours later. He had never seen or known so much death in such a short space of political time. Maybe the place really was cursed?

It was distressing and terrifying all at the same time, and everyone was looking to him. Everyone wanted something. Everyone was waiting for him to slip up, to make an appointment, to explain the long and vibrant history of their armpit of a country. Any favours which were done for him were expected to be returned in double quick time. People were rude and self-interested and uncaring and unkind. The French press continued to pick him and his wife apart. He felt a vein throb in his forehead – this always happened when he thought of her coming under attack, but lately that feeling had been more and more frequent. House had told him on more and more occasions that he had looked tired. Was he going to make it across the finish line? He had to, otherwise Roosevelt would swoop in and claim all the credit. The credit was his, because he had been here from the beginning while Roosevelt didn’t even know what party he served – Wilson knew he served America, he knew…was Flanagan still talking? Enough was enough.

Wilson rose up from his seat abruptly, so that the chair legs scraped off the oak floor. ‘Gentlemen, I do apologise, but I am late enough already for the C12 meeting.’ ‘But Mr President’, Oliver Flanagan pleaded, ‘I was just about to make a very important case for Harvard leading the way in its organisation of international oil exploration.’ Wilson smiled – House would have been proud to see two birds with one stone. ‘I’m sure the case is important indeed, Mr Flanagan, and I will eagerly wait for the next part of the tale, but for now the matters of statehood and state death are at stake, and I really must not wait any longer.’ His valet was already prepared, and with a half-smile indicated that he had the car running. Wilson smiled back at him, and panicked when he realised that, after all these weeks driving him around and getting to know details about him and his family, he’d forgotten this gentleman’s name. Had he ever known it? Wilson steadied himself, said a brief goodbye to an unimpressed Roosevelt, and opened the window of the car. He was going to need a lot of air.

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‘Maybe we got the wrong day?’ Fitzwilliam suggested. ‘You’re kidding me Fitzy’, Tancred whispered, ‘today is the day, today is the 22nd March. We’ve been waiting for more than 35 minutes. Either the President is lost, or we’re about to get some very bad news.’ ‘Oy, don’t say that, we’ve had enough of that already.’ ‘I know Fitzy I know, but think about it, does President Wilson seem a little off to you these days?’ ‘I feel just fine gentlemen’, boomed a voice from a few metres away. Sir Alistair Tancred and Arthur Fitzwilliam froze. It was just their luck to have their conversation overhead by the American President. ‘Mr President…’ Fitzwilliam began, ‘we were just…’ ‘Of course Mr Arthur, of course’, Wilson began, ‘I understand these things happen. Do be wary though – some people have even bigger ears than I do.’ Wilson sailed past the two Brits, opening a large wooden door into Stephen Pichon’s room as he did so. The door closed loudly behind him. Tancred just stared at it. ‘Did the President of the US just call me Mr Arthur?’ Fitzwilliam asked. ‘Did the President just make a joke?’ Tancred replied.

Inside, after making his apologies, which were certainly not needed, so he was told, Wilson sat down at his chair and looked around the room. The faces had certainly changed and grown in number since everyone had first gathered, with such high hopes, on 12th January. How long ago that all seemed now, how he longed to go back to a better time such as that. ‘Mr President’, AC grasped his hand. ‘I do hope we can find some common ground today. We have all been talking in the last thirty minutes about our mutual and commonly held aims for this conference, and we are in agreement about the importance of the LON and the necessity in destroying Bolshevism.’ Wilson swallowed hard; he was not a fan of this destroy Bolshevism business – Russians should be let sort things out for themselves. They would surely come through in the end once they realised how empty Bolshevism truly was. Still, if intervention in Russia could get everyone agreeing, then he was happy for now to sponsor it. The Germans seemed particularly keen; VLV had informed him the previous day that Germany could rely on its own freedom fighters in the Baltic. Wilson had then caused a ruckus by asking whether the Baltic should not go back to Russia; VLV hinted Germany had interests and legitimate ties to the region, and LG piped up that Baltic peoples had national aspirations of their own. ‘Gentlemen’, Rene Massigli began, ‘It is very important that we proceed with good pace through today’s agenda. Many of us are tired, and no doubt somewhat cranky, but we must push through nonetheless!’ Wilson smiled weakly. He wanted to be anywhere else but here. With a sense of dread he glanced at the itinerary. The list was long, and by no means straightforward.

Albert Claveille could feel the colour rushing to his cheeks. Why did it always feel like the President had no time for him? It was hard enough filling GC’s shoes without being reminded in every interaction how insignificant you are. RM looked back at him with a pained expression on his face. He knew his English was never going to be as good as Clemenceau’s, but he surely hadn't given Wilson cause to take offence. All he had said was that he hoped there would be room for common agreement; he had even mentioned the League, since that was always sure to get Wilson talking. It was almost as though the President was somewhere else. Maybe, Claveille dared to think, it was more than that. Wilson certainly seemed permanently tired these days, and not always able to hold the facts like he used to. Perhaps it was just the circumstances they were in – it had been a uniquely stressful week after all, after that business with the Italians evacuating and that Jewish Italian being arrested. Claveille kept forgetting to ask for more information about that, it was like he could never learn enough. He didn’t know how the late Clemenceau managed it. Massigli got his attention, and indicated he was about to begin. ‘It is very important that we proceed with good pace through today’s agenda’, his friend said. ‘Many of us are tired, and no doubt somewhat cranky, but we must push on regardless!’ Claveille noticed that an imitation of a smile played across Wilson’s face – he sincerely hoped that the President was going to be alright.

It had already been a long day, but the number of visitors and their varied nature threatened to make it an intolerable one. The King of Siam, or Prince of Siam, whatever he was, wanted to negotiate an advantageous trade deal with Europe, and had one with Japan already, or was it the other way around – Mr Maroon’s French wasn’t very good. Karhoo Rosnack, that infamous chain smoker, was as animated and expressive as ever. VLV made the cardinal error of mistaking Slovenia for Slovakia, and it seemed as though this cloud of smoke was fit to rain down upon the German General for his crimes. LG tactfully drew Rosnack’s attention away by asking more about the situation in Yugoslavia, which Rosnack continued to insist did not exist, even though it plainly did. Claveille half expected Rosnack to curse Pasic’s name before exiting, but although it seemed as though he was close to it, he did not quite go that far.

Claveille didn’t have to hide his scorn for the next victory – Charles Sheer of AL was a notorious pro-German and anti-French propagandist of the worst kind. That at least was what Clemenceau had said about him, but then it was hard to be neutral when the man was close to exposing the very hypocrisy of the whole conference. How could the allies insist upon the rights of self-determination on the one hand for the CPs, only to ignore these rights when it was their turn to listen? The question reminded him of Sean T O’Kelly’s performance early in the year, where dominion status for Ireland was granted. God – that had been long ago – back when Joseph Doherty had been alive. Sheer was short, balding and walked with a limp – he was an easy target for the butt of jokes, but he was also rational, intelligent, multilingual and incredibly sharp. He seemed to have an answer for everything, and in perfect English discussed Princeton University with Wilson, where Wilson had been President for over a decade, and where Sheer had studied international law.

Claveille couldn’t help but feel inadequate – he had only a technical degree, and spoke English with a strong accent. Clemenceau had always said it didn’t matter, but maybe he had only said that to make him feel better? ‘Monsieur Claveille?’ Drat, Charles Sheer had been talking to him. ‘M. Sheer, I do appreciate your even-handed, dexterous approach to balancing French and German loyalties simultaneously, but I would ask that you do get to the point.’ There was an awkward silence – had Sheer actually been talking to him? ‘Certainly, M. Claveille, I just asked whether you have heard from Clemenceau’s son since the funeral. My son and his were quite close a few years ago.’ Oh Christ, why couldn’t the room just swallow him whole?! The only person here who looked worse than him was Wilson, who still had that weak smile stapled onto his worn face.

Venizelos was next, which at least gave Claveille something to look forward to. Venizelos talked as though he cared about you, your family, and that pet you lost as a child. He was warm, respectful and infinitely sensitive to protocol, never once demanding or barely even requesting, and Claveille knew it was working. He was trying again for Cyprus, but only slyly. Above all he wanted to express his concerns regarding Albania, which he insisted was coveted by Italy, was an unnatural creation of 1913, and was too unstable to last long. Venizelos said that he regretted the Italians were not present to answer the request, but he insisted that a committee to determine the future of Albania should be established. A few people nodded their heads – another committee! LG called out to Venizelos, asking him if he had thought any more about the occupation of Thrace. Venizelos insisted that Thrace was a melting pot of civilized and uncivilised peoples, but that Greeks were of a majority. LG said he agreed, Venizelos chuckled, and Claveille suddenly felt as though he was intruding on some kind of bromance.

An Arab candidate stood before them next, and curiously, Baron Nabuaki, silent up to this point, said an awful lot of words. At one point a translator beside Nabuaki began working overtime…was Nabuaki speaking in Japanese to this Arabian? And the Arabian was understanding him? When had this hulking warrior been to the Orient? So many questions, but Nabuaki was keeping his secrets under wraps, although Claveille realised he’d never seen the old Baron laugh so much. It was a bizarre feeling to be excluded by language from a conversation, and not to know the full details. Was this how VO had felt? Claveille felt his stomach lurch – he had skipped lunch again that day, there had simply been no time to eat. ‘Prince Nawwar Sharif wishes to remind those present that he awaits confirmation of his family’s prerogative over the Arabian peninsula, and for equal trading opportunities with Britain and France. Japan, his highness believes, would be best positioned out of all the powers to pursue a mandate in the region, for its interests coincide with those of the Sharifii family.’

What had just happened?! The Japanese to French translator finished his final sentence of Nabuaki’s speech in such a way that it almost sounded like the official was apologising and asking a question at the same time. Yet next to nobody was paying attention. ‘Perhaps’, piped up LG, ‘we should resume such a weighted development as this in the near future. Thank you Prince Sharif, we will see you again in a few days.’ Sharif explained in perfect English – the fifth language he had spoken fluently in this room by this point – that he could not go into the good night once more and leave his country’s future up to the hands of fate. In other words, he refused to leave unless something was done for Sharifii Arabia, or whatever he wanted to call it. LG, flummoxed and evidently taken aback, asked Nabuaki what he thought should be done – Nabuaki responded that Japan would happily give up its pretensions as a mandatory power over Arabia, as soon as the Shantung peninsula was confirmed to Japan. So that was his game. Wilson perked up, then sat back into his chair again when he realised he did not have the energy to debate at this point in the day. Claveille was right there with him. After a short discussion, Sharif indicated he would be satisfied with an invitation to return to the C12 tomorrow.

Paul Hymans and his bumbling sidekick entered the room next, and Dinglebrush managed, somehow, to trip over the lip of the rug on his way in the door, causing a tremendous crash, and leaving Hymans mortified over what to do. He waited for Dinglebrush to get to his feet, and as he scrambled to do so, his trousers ripped all down the seam. The rip sounded so unreal, Claveille was at first certain that Dinglebrush had made the sound himself as a joke. But when the Belgian stood up, and Hymans had cursed in Dutch and French in rapid succession, as though he had to let the gods of both languages know how cursed he truly felt, it was realised in the room that Dinglebrush had done it again. ‘Gentlemen’, Hymans began, somehow with composure, ‘my friend and I will take a recess, and will return tomorrow with our findings.’ Claveille heard Massigli express his disappointment, and it was probably genuine. On days like these, sometimes Dinglebrush was the only entertainment they had.

On a more sombre note, at 8.45PM when he was beyond hungry, Claveille was forced to listen to a representative, from Hungary! Claveille kept the irony to himself, but even in his impatient, tired, and hangry state, he couldn’t felt but feel impressed with this woman. Lady Elleanora Csok – the black widow, as Massigli whispered to him, had a reputation which spoke for itself. Hungary, Csok said, was in a state of crisis. While she wished to not blacken the reputation of her country, and while she thanked the allies for their hard work so far, she impressed upon them, with eloquence and grace, the bare facts. The creeping tentacles of Bolshevism, Csok said, were grasping at Budapest, and a communist party had infiltrated many aspects of the SDP of the state. The Communists were not, Csok said, strong enough to make any kind of stand, and the political opposition as well as the militia on the streets had been armed by the allies in the weeks’ past, so there was no danger of any kind of fait accompli being launched.

Still though, Csok urged those present to think of the fate of her country when they planned an invasion of Bolshevik Russia. This act would, Csok said, embolden the more dangerous elements of the Bolsheviks in Hungary. The more desperate they were, the more likely they were to strike, and when that happened, nobody could predict what would happen next. Csok urged the leaders to make use of Hungary as a base of operations for their intervention into Russia. That way, Lady Csok said, Hungarian people would see that the allies had not abandoned them, and that there was no need to resort to such extremism. Her proposal struck a chord, but Wilson indicated that it would be up to those present to vote in the coming week. Lady Nora thanked those present for their support, alluding in particular to the timely solving of the Transylvanian problem, which had helped to ease tensions between Romanians and Magyars, at least for now. Take peace for granted in the east, Csok concluded, and all that the allies had worked for could so easily go up in flames in an afternoon. This Hungarian countess had made quite the impression, and she was invited back the next morning to discuss Hungarian matters further.

Everyone in the room took a breath as Lady Csok left. Was their list of visitors finally at an end? It seemed, impossibly, as though it was. Claveille looked around the room. It seemed only LG was as bright and wary as he had been when the meeting had started a few hours before. Claveille checked his pocket watch – now the clock was saying 9.30PM. Time truly had flown by when listening to that Countess speak. The room was evidently full of tired men. Protocols and small chat, mercifully, were now skipped. The delegates grunted at one another a goodbye or goodnight, and marched off. Standing outside, breathing in as much air as he could fit into his lungs, Claveille believed he could see the President get into his car. As soon as the President sat into his seat, WW appeared to fall asleep. The man was evidently finding it difficult to keep going, but just like everyone else in this troubled city, with the world resting on their shoulders, he had no choice but to carry on…

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And that dear delegates is the end of the episode. In this instalment an awful lot has taken place, and your chairman has been positively worn out examining all of your exploits. From this episode you’ll hopefully grasp that what Paris really needs right now is some kind of commission to take charge of military strategy in Russia. If an intervention is to take place as you guys voted for, then it must be coordinated properly, and the Bolsheviks must not be underestimated. Due to the announced intention of the allies to intervene in proper force and with a genuine plan, Admiral Kolchak in Siberia has been emboldened, and his offensive makes good ground. Unfortunately though, William Bullitt and the people on his deputation to Russia have disappeared, perhaps being held captive by Lenin’s regime should he become useful as a hostage.

With so much up in the air this week, I am uniquely not going to request that you vote on a proposal. I am, however, going to ask you to turn your attentions towards creating this commission for the invasion of Russia. And please, for all our sakes, don’t try to shoehorn moist into the commission’s name. With all that being said then dear delegates, I will now take my leave, my name is Zack, I have been your chairman, and you have been a delegate, dear listener and history friend. Thanks for listening and I’ll be seeing you all next week…