

Encapsulated Season 5 - Episode 7

FADE IN:

INT. BLANK WHITE HALLWAY

Mike, Savitri, and Helena are sitting patiently next to a dark blue door. Pearl is standing nearby. It's quiet. Eerily quiet.

Suddenly, the door swings open, and Xenia steps out.

XENIA

Hello, contestants, and thank you for waiting. We're ready to begin. We will start with Mike. Mike, are you ready?

(Mike nods)

Excellent. Please come with me.

Mike follows her through the door. Pearl, Savitri, and Helena exchange awkward glances while they wait.

INT. DIMLY LIT CORRIDOR

Xenia is leading Mike down the hallway, preparing him for the next challenge.

XENIA

So, you are about to meet the council of elders: the 24 that you mentioned earlier.

MIKE

Okay. And you said they're not on thrones?

XENIA

(chuckles)

No, not on thrones. We replaced those... Perhaps, 200, 300 years ago?

(she shrugs)

Have to keep up with the times.

They chuckle, then approach another blue door. They pause before entering.

XENIA

Alright, best of luck.

MIKE

Thanks. Anything I should know ahead of time?

Xenia thinks it over for a second.

XENIA

Nope.

She winks at him, then opens the door.

INT. AUDITORIUM

Mike is blinded by the lights in the room, and the flashes from two dozen cameras. There's a mob of male reporters (24 to be exact), dressed like they're from the 1920s, snapping photos and asking questions.

Xenia gestures for Mike to take the stage, then she leaves and shuts the door behind her. Mike composes himself, and confidently steps to the center.

Note: since they're all identical-looking, they'll each simply be referred to as REPORTER.

REPORTER

Mike! Tell us! How often do you explode?

MIKE

Well, I-

(he's caught off guard)

How often do I explode??

REPORTER

Would you say more or less than once a pizza?

MIKE

I don't- I don't follow.

REPORTER

Have you ever done it in France?

MIKE

No, I've never actually been to France, but-

REPORTER

So are you a Nazi? Or a woman?

MIKE

... What?

REPORTER

Rumor has it that you're an alligator. Would you care to comment?

MIKE

I'm- no, last I checked, I was not an... What?

REPORTER

If you had to choose an alligator as your running mate, would it be made of gold?

MIKE

It would- I'm sorry, I don't understand.

REPORTER

Why are you refusing to answer? Are you secretly an FBI pillow?

Mike is speechless, to say the least.

Switch to clips of Savitri and Helena, also undergoing the same bizarre interrogation. Each of them are on their own, but the scene cuts back and forth between them.

REPORTER

On a scale of yes to 10, how high are you?

SAVITRI

I've never been high in my life.

REPORTER

Does that mean you're a Beatles fan?

SAVITRI

It means- hmm? Beg pardon?

Switch to Helena.

REPORTER
Studies show that women. Care to comment?

HELENA
That women what? What do women... Do? Think? Eat?

REPORTER
Women.

HELENA
I'm- I don't understand the-

REPORTER
Have you ever been in love with a book?

HELENA
I mean, yes, I enjoy books, and-

REPORTER
What flavor?

HELENA
... Of book?

REPORTER
Why are you bringing up books? Please try to stay on track, ma'am.

Switch to Mike.

REPORTER
Are you opposed to the death penicillin?

MIKE
The death penicillin - you mean, penalty?

REPORTER
This isn't the gym, sir.
(the reporters laugh)
But on the topic of birds... Should we?

Mike has no response.

Switch to Savitri.

REPORTER

Do you deny the allegations?

SAVITRI

What allegations? You didn't list any...

REPORTER

So that's a yes. And your husband?

SAVITRI

What does he have to do with-

REPORTER

Do you regularly murder tables?

SAVITRI

I- Tables? Are you on drugs?

REPORTER

Was not available for comedy...

Switch to Helena.

REPORTER

However, the referee was paid off - correct?

HELENA

What referee? You just asked about llamas!

REPORTER

Please don't change the topic. Was the referee part of the Mafia or not?

HELENA

(suddenly it clicks)

The British Mafia? Or the... The Solar Mafia?

REPORTER

Both. Neither.

HELENA

Fifty dollars. Next question.

Switch to Mike.

REPORTER

Now, as the pope, would you be the pope?

MIKE

... Yes...?

REPORTER

But not the pope?

MIKE

... What...?

REPORTER

Except if you're the pope?

MIKE

...

Switch to Savitri.

REPORTER

Which chess piece is the most leafy?

SAVITRI

None of them! They're chess pieces!

REPORTER

Don't you think that's close-minded?

SAVITRI

Don't you hear how idiotic you sound?

REPORTER

Can you please rephrase the question in the form of a question?

SAVITRI

Can I- No, I can't! It already is a question!

REPORTER

Unfortunately, that question has been asked, moving on to bowler hats.

Switch to Helena.

REPORTER

So you ADMIT that the bombs were licorice?

HELENA

Because the train was late.

REPORTER

Except there were rats onboard.

HELENA

I've already had my potatoes for the day.

REPORTER

And your boss?

HELENA

Television.

For the first time, the reporters go quiet - they simply write down her answer as if it's incredibly profound. Helena just nods proudly.

XENIA (VOICE ONLY)

Please give it up for our finalists!

Jump ahead to the next scene, where all three humans are on stage along with Xenia.

The reporters have put their cameras aside and are now applauding enthusiastically.

Savitri seems mildly annoyed, Mike is still puzzled, and Helena is pleased with her performance.

Finally, the applause dies down.

XENIA

Now. The goal of this challenge was to simulate the experience of PRAYER. As God, you will be bombarded with the prayers of humanity 24/7, which can be overwhelming.

SAVITRI

But what was the point of the questions? They-
They didn't make any sense.

XENIA

Neither does the whole of humanity's prayers.
Certainly individual prayers make sense, but,
the combination of them can often seem chaotic,
incoherent, impossible to understand..

MIKE

Ohhhh... Okay... I think I got it now.

XENIA

Precisely. And you held up rather well, Mike,
excellent job.

(the reporters clap for him)

Helena, you seemed to have figured it out.

HELENA

(chuckles)

Yeah, I didn't know that it was about prayer,
but I figured you were testing to see how well
we played along with them.

XENIA

Mm-hmm. And you were stellar. Well done.

(even louder applause for her)

Unfortunately, Savitri - you did crack and
belittle the reporters. As God, you would need
to have more tact.

SAVITRI

That's fair. So I'm eliminated, I assume?

XENIA

Yes, regrettably, you will not be going further.

SAVITRI

(shrugs nonchalantly)

Okay. Well, this was enlightening. And bizarre.

(she turns toward Helena and Mike)

Pleasure meeting you both. I think either of you
would make an excellent God.

The reporters 'awww' while Savitri and Helena hug goodbye. Savitri shakes Mike's hand, then waves goodbye politely and heads backstage with Pearl. Xenia proudly turns toward Mike and Helena.

XENIA

As for you both, congratulations on making it to the final round.

She motions for the reporters to applaud - they cheer especially loud this time. Mike and Helena smile humbly (though it's obvious they're proud to be the finalists).

INT. BLANK HALLWAY

Xenia, Mike and Helena are walking briskly down the hall. Pearl emerges from the gray door that leads to Earth.

XENIA

Ah, perfect timing!

PEARL

Hey! Congrats, you two.

They exchange smiles, and continue walking to the end of the hall. They stop in front of a bright red door.

HELENA

So... Are we finally meeting God?

XENIA

No, not yet - only his replacement will. This is your final evaluation, so to speak.

MIKE

Oh. We're just - we're moving right along.

XENIA

Mm-hmm. No sense in drawing it out.

(they chuckle)

Please, come on in.

She opens the door, and the four of them enter.

INT. JUDGE'S ROOM

Inside, the room is blank white and sterile (similar to the hallways). Near the back wall is a burnt orange table with four silver chairs.

Seated in two of the chairs are Maximilian and Apollyon. Xenia and Pearl sit in the other two. Xenia motions for Mike and Helena to stay standing opposite them.

XENIA

Shall we begin?

(the three other judges nod)

Perfect. Now, in Gabriel's absence, Pearl will be running this session.

(she turns toward Pearl)

Whenever you're ready.

PEARL

Thanks. Alright... So, first round. Messiahs.

(she turns to Maximilian)

Max, you want to kick us off?

MAXIMILIAN

Heck to the yeah.

He clears his throat, puts on a pair of reading glasses, and re-reads his notes from the round.

MAXIMILIAN

Mike! My man. You chose YOURSELF as the messiah, which was ballsy, arrogant, CLEVER, but it's unfortunately kinda narcissistic. So.. A swing and a miss, but at least you swung.

(Mike nods politely)

Helena, you had the single mother targeted for single mothers, because everyone else already has a messiah. Loved the mentality, and, yeah. I'd say you won that round.

Helena grins subtly, trying not to appear too excited.

Maximilian takes off his glasses and glances at Pearl. Pearl nods and writes on a sheet of paper.

PEARL

Thank you, Max. One for Helena...
(she turns to Apollyon)
Apollyon, round two?

Apollyon sighs dismissively.

APOLLYON

I mean, Helena, you didn't make a judgment, but Mike did. So, that's an easy one. Mike.

HELENA

Yes, and I thought about it after, and realized you were right about-

XENIA

I'm sorry, Helena, this isn't- we're looking at past performance only, so please, no-

HELENA

I- I just want to explain why I-

XENIA

I understand. But that's not how this works. You've had plenty of time to make your case, unfortunately, that time has now passed.

(she turns to Pearl)

Apologies. Please continue.

PEARL

No worries. So...

(she makes a note)

One for Mike... Okay. The third round was the Cosmic Race, which Mike and Jorge won. So...

(she makes a note)

Another point for Mike.

Helena is getting anxious. Now Mike is trying to not seem overly excited.

PEARL

Round four was Who Wants to be a Deity, which didn't count because we didn't finish, so... So... We can call that a wash...?

She glances at Xenia, who nods in approval. Pearl writes it down, then looks up at Mike and Helena sympathetically.

PEARL

And if we had to base it on your performance, you both would've won for the way you handled things with Jorge. That was... Very inspiring.

(Xenia and Maximilian nod in agreement)

Round five was the group elimination, and so, nobody wins that one... Well, you won by not getting eliminated.

(they chuckle)

And, round six. The press conference. Xenia?

XENIA

Yes. Helena won without a doubt.

PEARL

Okay. One for Helena... Which leaves a tie.

(she glances at Xenia)

And if they tie...

XENIA

We are prepared for this scenario, yes. Do you mind if I take over?

(Pearl defers to her)

So. In this case, given that you're both clearly very qualified for the role, we will apply the lowest-impact rule. Which, luckily, will break the tie in this case. Although we do have other tiebreaker-breakers as backups.

PEARL

Right, lowest-impact. Duh.

XENIA

(turns to Mike and Helena)

As you may have gathered, there are many rules to keep track of.

(they all laugh)

Pearl, do you want to explain the rule?

PEARL

Sure. Yeah, I think I got this. Actually, wait...

She and Xenia whisper briefly with each other. Meanwhile, Apollyon rolls her eyes impatiently.

APOLLYON

I think I'm just gonna leave now..

XENIA

Oh, yes. Thank you, Apollyon.

(Apollyon leaves abruptly)

Maximilian, you're free to stay, or-

MAXIMILIAN

Of course I'll stay. Big moment.

He smiles at the candidates, while Pearl and Xenia finish their conversation. Finally, Pearl explains the rule.

PEARL

So, the lowest-impact rule. As God, you won't be on Earth anymore. Which means, you'll be leaving your family, friends, communities-

MIKE

That's Mark 10, I believe? Right?

PEARL

What? Oh, yes! Very good. You know your verses.

(they chuckle)

So, as such, we want to pick the person who has FEWER ties to Earth, to minimize the impact of their absence. And in this case, it's clear..

(she pauses)

It's clear that Mike - no offense, Helena - but, Mike has a lot more connections.

(she turns to Mike)

You have the church, your family, community, friends, generally more ties to local business..

(she turns to Helena)

And while your family is important, believe me, I'm not trying to minimize it - you mainly have that and a small group of friends. Correct?

(Helena nods)

So.. Mike, take this as a compliment, we will be sending you back, because you'll be missed more.

MIKE

Understood. If that's the criteria...

(he chuckles)

I guess if I'm being eliminated for anything,
that's the best I could ask for.

(they all laugh)

Well, congratulations, Helena. You earned it.

HELENA

Thanks. It was a pleasure meeting you.

MIKE

Likewise. I'm sure you'll do a great job.

(he heads to the exit)

So, do I just-

PEARL

Oh, right. Sorry. I'll show you out.

She stands up and walks over to him and Helena, along with Maximilian, who shakes both their hands.

MAXIMILIAN

(to Mike)

Take care, sir.

(to Helena)

And I think you'll LOVE the job.

He holds Helena's gaze and shakes his head slightly 'no', like he's trying to dissuade her... But then he quickly covers it up with a smile.

MAXIMILIAN

Xenia, Pearl, it's been real.

XENIA

Likewise, Maximilian.

He leaves the room. Xenia approaches Mike and Helena.

XENIA

I would like to echo his congratulations.
Both of you have much to be proud of for
progressing this far.

PEARL

Yes, both of you were definitely... God material.

XENIA

Agreed. Now, Pearl will escort you both to the transfer room.

HELENA

Wait, I thought I was-

XENIA

Oh, we forgot to mention that. You will also be returning to Earth for a few hours, so you can say goodbye to your loved ones. Then you'll be coming back here permanently.

(Helena nods understandingly)

Is that workable?

HELENA

I mean, I guess, but it's not a lot of time...

XENIA

Unfortunately, no, but we do want to keep things moving quickly, as you can imagine.

HELENA

Absolutely. And then when I come back, I'll finally meet God? Before I take over?

XENIA

Mm-hmm. Yes, you'll meet him, and then we'll transition the role to you.

(Helena grins excitedly)

So! Back to Earth?

Pearl leads Helena and Mike back into the hall. Xenia just watches them ominously for a few seconds, then walks away in the other direction.

FADE OUT.