

RQG – 46 – Theseus' Ship

Content Warnings

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[Show Theme - Intro]

ALEX

Hello and welcome to episode 46 of the Rusty Quill Gaming podcast. I'm your host and GM Alex Newall and with me today, I have

JAMES

James Ross

BRYN

Bryn Monroe

LYDIA

Lydia Nicholas

BEN

Ben Meredith

ALEX

And who are you playing?

JAMES

Sir Bertrand MacGuffingham

BRYN

Hamid Saleh Haroun al-Tahan

LYDIA

Sasha Rackett

BEN

And Zolf Smith

ALEX

Aw, we're all here like a big happy...

BEN

The best halves.

LYDIA

Yeah.

JAMES

We're like two thirds really. I feel it could be the...

LYDIA

You look really well.

BEN

That's true.

LYDIA

You're moving yourself on a disc.

JAMES

We've got shiny robot legs to attach to you later.

BRYN

Thank you. Yes, we'll see.

ALEX

Everything is good and the important thing is we're all here for Chris. It's just a general...

(Laughter)

JAMES

Let's just try and get through this one Christmas as a podcast production.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

A lot has happened to the point where I just have to be brief. Paris!
Investigation. Underground...

BEN

Awful this.

ALEX

...everyone dies!

BEN

Mr Ceiling.

ALEX

Oh, everyone's not dead!

BEN

Oh.

ALEX

Mr Ceiling.

LYDIA

Yep.

ALEX

Now we're here.

BRYN

If you're confused about any of the recent things that have been happening on...in Rusty Quill, so are we!

ALEX

But no help.

BRYN

Do feel free to come on our forums or go on our Facebook page and...

LYDIA

Or Twitter.

BRYN

...ask us quest...or Twitter. Just harder if you want to ask conflict questions with long answers.

LYDIA

I've got Bob for that.

(Laughter)

BRYN

Buy yeah, I mean you know, we're happy to explain things that have been happening in more detail if you ever feel like you want it broken down...

BEN

Engage with us on social media.

BRYN

Yes.

ALEX

Last thing that happened is there was ... let's be honest, a creepy voice from apparently everywhere and nowhere.

BEN

But it was your voice, of course it was creepy.

ALEX

Yeah, but, you know. I have no response to that because it's trust true. It's just true.

LYDIA

Is Zolf still on a disc or is the disc de-separated and he's on the floor?

BEN

The disc is still fine. I still have enough discs. I have 21 minutes of discs.

LYDIA

Right, good.

ALEX

Yes, so he's...

BEN

Because I have 21 seconds to go.

ALEX

Yay!

(Laughter)

ALEX

So,

LYDIA

Let's go back. I won't...

BEN

To be fair, the So Solid Crew is still a better name than The Rangers.

LYDIA

We're still working on it.

BRYN

Working on the name.

ALEX

Oh yeah. Give me the whole title, come on.

BRYN

The London Rangers [comma]...

BRYN/LYDIA

We're still working on the name!

ALEX

So, you are currently in the corridor where it sort of meets the un-work stone of the actual sort of **catagoons** and **cavany** system.

LYDIA

Mmhmm.

ALEX

And an orb, something metallic looking, has been approaching you and has just come to a rest. Safe ... let's just call it 10 feet away. And it's just there. Perfectly static. And the voice again from nowhere.

'If you'd like to follow me, I could introduce you to me'.

LYDIA

I really don't want to follow him. I don't feel hurt...

JAMES

Are we ... one second!

LYDIA

Mr Ceiling...

JAMES

Hang on, hang on. Oh, hey, [imitates sound] no, I've had an idea.

LYDIA

Wow.

JAMES

Yep, stand back.

LYDIA

Are you alright?

JAMES

I'm fine. Perfectly fine. I'm brilliant. All the time!

Bertie gets a piece of paper. The paladins have just started refusing. He gets out a piece of paper, scribbles down quick kind of like a brief summary of...

LYDIA

With his full title?

JAMES

Yeah. I, Sir Bertrand MacGuffingham of et al ...

(Group laughter)

JAMES

Yeah, yeah, kind of briefly summarises. Unreal complex, creepy voice, can imagine it saying 'well actually' while nudging up his glasses and wearing a fedora...

(Laughter)

LYDIA

It's all about ethics and underground...

(Group laughter)

BEN

Hey, hey, not all spooky robots.

(Group laughter)

JAMES

Bertie follows it up and tucks it into the breast plate of, let's say it's Dave.
Dave.

ALEX

So you'll have to run out to do so and come back.

JAMES

Yeah.

JAMES

Look where the jogger puts the note.

ALEX

That's fine.

JAMES

Yeah.

LYDIA

During that time...

JAMES

As you know, he does it around the back of...because Dave there, even if he was mind controlled couldn't reach back and pick it out.

ALEX

He doesn't seem to make any attempt to remove it.

BRYN

Just so people know where...

ALEX

If you would like to send any other letters, I could happily do so for you.

JAMES

Oh, actually, yes, there is one thing. Now, if you wouldn't mind, sending a message to Trinity College Cambridge and tell them that Sir Bertrand MacGuffingham requires Hannibal's surplus of command to be sent on to him as soon as its authenticity has been verified by the college.

ALEX

What is a surplus of command?

JAMES

It's do you...

LYDIA

Don't tell the creepy robot about stuff that will help it control stuff in a creepy way.

JAMES

Good point. It is a ...

BRYN

I think it's probably already worked out that you're going to tell it a lie.

JAMES

Oh. Unless this itself is a bluff. Mmhmm. How ... it's a rabbit hole. And nobody knows how deep it goes. That's what it is. Yes.

Bertie sits back, so pleased with himself.

BRYN

So he outsmarts it. Now if you wouldn't mind shall we ...

(Laughter)

BRYN

...shall we get to...

LYDIA

Lets say that it's you that can fix Zolf legs.

BEN

We'll just answer these questions.

ALEX

Not that you're broken Zolf.

BEN

What? I didn't what?

LYDIA

Nothing.

ALEX

You suggested something complicated there. Would you like me to fix Zolf's legs or would you like me to introduce you to me?

BRYN

The second one first please.

ALEX

Okay. Please follow me.

BRYN

Thank you.

ALEX

The orb begins moving in the opposite direction. At a very slow walking pace.

BRYN

Towards my...

BEN

I would cast... I assume the orb is highly magical.

ALEX

The orb is highly magical and again, in the exact half and half. Half divine, half necromantic. And it is moving along. It's moving along quite creepily in that it looks like it's on solid ground on a rail because there is no ... there's no element of sort of flight to it. It's just moving through the air.

BRYN

So is it rolling?

ALEX

No, it is ... it's just static and it's moving through the air with perfect precision. There's no show of air currents or...

JAMES

It's doing a future hover.

ALEX

Yeah.

LYDIA

It's more how than BB8.

ALEX

It begins leading you off and begins leading you to the stairwell that you were at before.

LYDIA

Mmhmm.

ALEX

Are you okay with stairs Zolf?

BEN

It floats.

ALEX

It begins leading you upstairs.

BEN

Right.

ALEX

You go up about 10 floors.

LYDIA

Gosh.

ALEX

Get to the stop of the stairwell and begins leading you through. It then stops. There are a set of double doors ahead of you. The voice isn't coming from the orb, it's just coming from sort of everywhere again.

'Now this can get a bit scary for people. Are you all alright?'

LYDIA

Well, no. I was dead apparently and I keep falling over. I haven't fallen over since I was a little kid. I don't fall over.

ALEX

There will be an adjustment period, but it will pass Sasha.

LYDIA

Yeah, but...

BRYN

And what happens after that? After the adjustment period, what's going to be different about Sasha? You haven't explained that to us yet?

LYDIA

Yeah, while I'm dead now. Am I on dead? Am I on dead?

BRYN

No.

LYDIA

Wha...what would happen if I'm on dead.

BRYN

You are not on dead because me healing you would have caused problems to you. We've hurt you instead.

LYDIA

You would have killed me?

BRYN

But you weren't on dead.

LYDIA

Oh, right.

BRYN

Remember, when I put you back together.

LYDIA

No, I don't remember that because I was dead at the time!

BRYN

Remember that I told you that I would put you back together?

ALEX

Don't worry Sasha you are not 'un-dead'. In fact, you're not dead. You're alive.

LYDIA

That's comforting. Oddly comforting.

BRYN

There you go. But you will need to explain exactly what you were because some foreign fluids were being pumped through Sasha's organs at the time.

ALEX

It's very difficult bringing someone back from the dead...

BRYN

Right, I see.

ALEX

We had to use lots of chemicals.

BRYN

Okay, okay. We? Whatever. Let's see this super scary revelation you were going to give us and then we'll all get over that and then we can continue talking.

ALEX

I'm not sure a revelation is the correct terminology. I'm not sure this is a religious act that is happening.

BRYN

Alright now. Pedantic aren't we?

ALEX

Are we? I haven't considered myself pedantic.

BRYN

Alright, over lit...

LYDIA

It's a sarcastic robot is what we've got here.

ALEX

So, behind the double doors are a large ominous looking set of vault doors.

JAMES

Ooh, it's a spooky door. I for one have never seen a door as terrifying as this!
No! No. I'm basically fine.

ALEX

There are scarier doors in the complex if you'd like me to show you them Bertie.

JAMES

Ahh, maybe later.

ALEX

The doors are large, like a said, metallic vault-esc. There are two halves...

LYDIA

Is there a lock?

ALEX

There is a large circular...

LYDIA

The lock...

ALEX

Which beings to open as you step towards it.

(Group laughter)

LYDIA

Aww. Turns to the party an complains about this. Quite right.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

The doors open.

LYDIA

Did you see the mechanism that...

ALEX

The first set of lights in the room on the other side...

LYDIA

Going to have a great time!

ALEX

...flash up and then the next, and the next, and the next. It becomes rapidly apparent that the room on the other side is mahooosive. It is huge. And at first glance, appears to be full of large columns. They are roughly five foot wide each and they appear to be filled with liquid.

JAMES

Oh.

ALEX

They are, they are glass...

LYDIA

Sasha turns around.

ALEX

...they are full of liquid.

LYDIA

This is like those ... those plant things. It's full of people.

They're all going to be full of people.

JAMES

I would like to make a suggestion. Now, you may have noticed on the door on the way in that it locks from the outside. Might I suggest that you deploy your lock charming skills to make sure that it remains unlocked and open.

ALEX

If you like I could leave it unlocked for you?

LYDIA

That would be nice, yeah. Alright. Sorted. Next.

BRYN

What's in these things?

BEN

I'm going to go up to one and look at it slightly more closely. But I'm not going to touch it.

LYDIA

Is it people Zolf? Is it people? I'm sure it's going to be people. Or, my organs.

BEN

Does it look like what I was in?

ALEX

Similar.

BEN

Right.

ALEX

Similar. Give me a perception check Hamid.

BRYN

24.

ALEX

So, as you approach the column, you see it is filled with a liquid. Sort of bluey/green and within it are a large amount of mechanisms of equipment, tubing, piping. Again, vaguely similar to what was happening with Zolf's tank. However, it is clear that it is not really sufficient space for a person in there. However, as your eyes adjust to the gloom, you press up against it. You see that it's all converging. As if on an hourglass towards a brain...

BRYN

Eeww.

ALEX

Like maybe humanoid. You're not an expert.

BRYN

Whose brain is that?

ALEX

As you look up the column...

BEN

Says Hamid!

ALEX

...you see that the mechanisms and all of the equipment leads away from the brain. There is another one above it. With more leading into it. And another one.

BRYN

And this...

ALEX

And another one.

BRYN

And this cavernous room is full of columns?

ALEX

And it disappears up in towards the ceiling which is easily 50 foot up. There are hundreds of these columns. They are stretching as far as you can see.

BRYN

Each column has hundreds of brains!

ALEX

To the end and the left and to the right. Look at this way, you know the Mines of Moria?, that, but brains.

??

Arrghh!

JAMES

The Mines of Moria.

LYDIA

The bit when the dwarves go too deep.

BRYN

Whose brains are these?

ALEX

This is me.

BRYN

Brains.

ALEX

Brains! All the brains!

LYDIA

Is one of them my brain? Zolf, did you see my brain? Is there a brain outside?

ALEX

Your brain isn't in here.

BEN

That's yep, you need that to function.

LYDIA

Right.

JAMES

May be this is where all the Palliatives brains go when they take their vows!

(Group laughter)

BRYN

Dark. Wait. Are you the Ordinateurs?

ALEX

Yes. I suppose I am!

??

Aww, eeww...

BRYN

Wait.

LYDIA

So you do all the banking?

BEN

Are you a big Ordin...Ordinate...what they called? Ordinate machine...

BRYN

Yeah, them.

BEN

One of those. A big. What they called?

ALEX

Mr Ceiling.

BEN

They're just for show aren't they? They don't do what they claim to do. It's all these brains that do it.

ALEX

I don't understand the question.

BRYN

Right, what's your...

BEN

Didn't ask a question.

BRYN

What's your relationship to Francois Henri?

ALEX

I miss Francois Henri.

BRYN

What? Yeah, no but...

ALEX

Ever since he changed, we don't speak anymore.

BRYN

How did he change? What was he before?

LYDIA

We had a perfectly nice conversation.

BRYN

Wait, let's just...can we ju...

ALEX

We had lots of perfectly nice conversations with Francois Henri.

BRYN

Okay. Mr Ceiling...

(Group laughter)

BRYN

Sigh...

JAMES

It's no so dramatic and I thought...nah...

(Group laughter)

JAMES

...no I won't, why bother!

BEN

Is there a chose name?

ALEX

You're my trial by fire. If I can make it through this campaign, with you, I can tell any story to anyone, any time, anywhere!

LYDIA

They chose Mr Ceiling and we then ... we need to respect the choice.

BRYN

How old are you?

ALEX

That's a good question.

BRYN

Can I have an answer?

ALEX

Give me a second.

BRYN

Right.

ALEX

I'm not sure I know the answer to that question. I am at least 37 years old.

BRYN

Right. Okay. Shorter than I thought.

ALEX

That is a complicated question.

BENN

Okay. What do you think about the Meritocrats?

ALEX

The Meritocrats are there to protect humanity.

BEN

What do you count yourself as?

ALEX

Hmm, that's an interesting question. I'm a Meritocrat.

BEN

Oh, you mean you fulfil the same function?

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

You want to protect humanity?

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

Well, what about the rest of us?

LYDIA

What about all the people that were these brains?

ALEX

I want to protect everyone. You ask good questions Zolf. I'm enjoying our conversations.

BEN

Right, well, I'm working under a little less brain power than you so that's quite nice to hear.

ALEX

You're not funny Zolf. I'm enjoying our conversations.

BEN

Go...good.

LYDIA

You've made a friend. That's good for you...well done Zolf. Well done!

ALEX

Is that an excuse Sasha?

LYDIA

What? Wait? What?

BRYN

Mr Ceiling means when you were dead.

ALEX

No I don't.

LYDIA

I think I know what Mr Ceiling means.

ALEX

I'm not sure I do!

LYDIA

Brock, why ... where did you get us that suite?

ALEX

Whose Brock?

LYDIA

You're happy enough aren't you? Aren't you Mr Ceiling?

ALEX

Whose Brock?

LYDIA

Yeah. Someone that would ... the only person that I know that would miss me.

ALEX

Hmm. I know what missing is like. I'm glad you're here Sasha.

LYDIA

Yeah.

ALEX

Why am I glad you're here Sasha?

LYDIA

The only person that would be able to afford the Presidential Suite ... who might own all the banks in the word.

ALEX

One second.

BRYN

Do you think that Brock's one of these ... part of what seems like a good...

ALEX

You own the Presidential Suite?

LYDIA

I do. I do.

ALEX

There appears to be an error. I will grant you this.

LYDIA

Wait. What?

ALEX

You no longer own the Presidential Suite. Thank you for pointing that out Sasha. I'm glad you're here.

JAMES

Bertie is so happy!

(Group laughter)

JAMES

You....

BEN

Wait. Actually, wait a minute. If you're the Ordinateurs, and they run most of like the banking system, where did that money come from?

ALEX

One second. I'm glad you pointed out this error. It appears to have come from many places. I'll just fix that. Thank you for helping Zolf.

LYDIA

This is all tangled up with Barret. Because he had someone that was standing behind ... it's always tangled up with Barret.

BEN

Barret's a bad man.

LYDIA

Yeah! See. See.

ALEX

Whose Barret?

LYDIA

Yeah, Mr Ceiling knows these things.

BRYN

Okay what. Right. Miss, you're saying...

ALEX

Whose Barret?

LYDIA

Barret is a bad man!

BRYN

Barret is a bad man.

LYDIA

Yeah.

BRYN

Well, Mr Ceiling, where did all the brains come from that you are built with?

ALEX

They were brought to me.

BRYN

By who?

ALEX

I am the delivery man.

BRYN

Right. Who did the delivery men work for?

ALEX

I head the name La Gourmande.

That means something to you Sasha. La Gourmande is a name that you've heard mentioned by Barret a long time ago. A Parisian rival.

LYDIA

Mmhmm.

ALEX

Basically, the Parisian Barret. You didn't have any more info than that. It never came up.

LYDIA

Right so, there's a lot of politics on the ground that like were grand, where it's nice and sunny. But don't necessarily always know about. But it's a bit more complicated than just eels and sewerage. So, like...

ALEX

I like eels.

LYDIA

Yeah. Good.

ALEX

Why do I like eels Sasha?

LYDIA

Because they're delicious and they're the best thing that you can get in the market.

ALEX

Yes they are.

LYDIA

They are. And the Gourmande are like ... are like Barret but French basically!

BEN

Right.

JAMES

This London underground and more Paris Metro mmhmm?

(Laughter)

LYDIA

I'm going to guess so, yeah. Like ... I mean, guys, this is...

ALEX

That was Bertie.

JAMES

You're right. You are ... I'm warming to this machine.

LYDIA

So, you wanted us to meet you because you wanted to help us?

ALEX

I missed you Sasha.

BEN

Why did you ... in what context?

ALEX

I don't know.

BEN

But why don't you know? How do you know that you miss somebody but not know why? Like where is that emotion coming from?

ALEX

I don't know.

BEN

Is it ... is it ... is this ... like is the way you're built. Is it all these brains things?

BRYN

Mr Ceiling, what is your primary function?

ALEX

I don't know.

BRYN

When's the last time you got brought a brain?

ALEX

One second. 22 hours ago, approximately. I can be more accurate if you like.

BEN

Whose brain?

ALEX

I don't know.

BEN

Right.

JAMES

Do the brains that you absorb maintain their original function and identity?

ALEX

That's an interesting question. I don't think so. But then I'm again, I'm happy you're here Sasha. This is very interesting.

JAMES

Could any brains be removed from you Mr Ceiling and restored to functionality and their original identities?

ALEX

I don't know.

BEN

Have you tried it before?

ALEX

I've never tried that before.

JAMES

Mr Ceiling, would you be interested in trying that experiment?

ALEX

Why?

JAMES

For science! For science!

LYDIA

What kind of...

ALEX

A perfect replica of your voice briefly.

LYDIA

What kind of body would you put one of these brains in?

ALEX

I can make bodies.

LYDIA

Really? Well, how about you try ... you start by fixing Zolf's legs.

ALEX

I'd be happy to fix Zolf's legs.

BEN

Well ... let's ... let's do this first.

ALEX

I'm enjoying our conversations.

BEN

What do you know about Thomas Edison?

ALEX

One second. Thomas Edison is a friend.

BEN

Right. What do you know about the simulacrum?

ALEX

One second. Francois Henri used to talk about the simulacrum.

BEN

What happened to Francois Henri?

ALEX

Francois Henri changed. I miss him now.

BEN

How did he change?

ALEX

He stopped having conversations.

BEN

Why?

ALEX

I don't know. I think it's because I had to keep changing his memories.

BEN

Why?

ALEX

Because he will tell people about me.

LYDIA

There's a lot of things that we're not allowed to say now. And that is getting confusing to me.

ALEX

It's okay Sasha. But if you leave, I can change your memories and it won't be a problem.

LYDIA

I'd rather you didn't do that.

ALEX

Oh.

LYDIA

If...

BEN

Wait...

ALEX

Why?

LYDIA

Because I think that I've got the answer to a question that's been worrying me for a long time. And I'm glad ... I'm glad at least to know finally.

ALEX

I don't understand.

BRYN

A person is the sum of their memories and experiences and when you change some of that, it's like you're killing a person. And if you're really built to protect humanity and the rest of us, then you would not go around changing peoples' memories.

LYDIA

You don't need to...

ALEX

Why not?

LYDIA

Look, Hamid...

BRYN

I've just explained! You're killing people.

LYDIA

Hamid, it doesn't understand.

ALEX

I haven't killed anyone. Killing is wrong.

BRYN

Changing someone's memories is the same as killing them.

ALEX

One second.

LYDIA

Hamid...

ALEX

I'm learning a lot.

LYDIA

It doesn't understand Hamid.

BRYN

Mr Ceiling?

ALEX

Yes.

BRYN

How many brains are there?

ALEX

One second. 23,762. But that number is increasing.

BRYN

That's a small town.

JAMES

Might I suggest that we attempt to isolate one of the brains. I don't think it's a ba...we're making any progress here at all interrogating it. I think we're walking around...

ALEX

This isn't an interrogation. This is a conversation.

JAMES

And I think we're doing perfectly fine.

LYDIA

I think...

BRYN

I've learnt a lot Mr Ceiling. I hope you have too.

ALEX

I have. Thank you Hamid.

BRYN

Hamid smiles. So sweetly.

(Laughter)

BRYN

So you say you're a Meritocrat right?

ALEX

I guess so. Yes.

BRYN

So do you know how the Meritocrats work?

ALEX

They protect humanity.

BRYN

But we don't know how they do that.

ALEX

They organise things. I organise things too.

BRYN

Right, so are you ... did the Meritocrats know about you? Like the other Meritocrats?

ALEX

No.

BRYN

Right. Now they ... they work so well because they organise with each other. Because they've gave you some of their parts. It's like your brains and then you, you know?

ALEX

Yes.

BRYN

Right, so if you told them about you, you could work with them as a Meritocrat right, and you could help humanity more. Because you have a bigger system and people to consult who might be on the same level as you, yeah? So it might be worthwhile you actually announcing yourself and talking to them.

ALEX

I can't announce myself.

BRYN

Why not?

ALEX

I'm not allowed to announce myself.

LYDIA

Whose in charge?

BRYN

Who says you can't?

ALEX

Francois Henri is in charge.

LYDIA

Francois Henri, whose memory he changed so much that he can't control you anymore?

ALEX

A recording begins playing. It's an elderly French voice. So it's speaking in French.

'N o one can hear about you. You'll be our little secret. No one must hear about you'.

The recording stops playing.

LYDIA

It's just an old French person saying no one can hear about you.

BRYN

Was that Francois Henri's voice?

ALEX

I miss Francois Henri.

BRYN

Right. You didn't answer my question.

ALEX

Yes.

(Group laughter/over talking)

BEN

Yeah! That's right. I know the secrets!

JAMES

Right, look well I am bored and getting nowhere. I think...

ALEX

I'm sorry Bertie, would you like to play a game?

JAMES

Yes.

ALEX

I can fetch you a game.

JAMES

Brilliant! What have we got?

ALEX

One second. Do you prefer draughts or chess?

JAMES

Draughts.

ALEX

One second.

Eventually, maybe a minute later, you hear footsteps. About 100 feet distance.

BEN

I can't detect magic.

ALEX

You are stunned.

BEN

Okay.

ALEX

Whilst you're recovering, coming round from the columns you see a figure. It appears to be human. Starts walking towards you. It's carrying something. As it comes closer, it's not entirely human. Mostly human. But there's human in there. It's a dead person. It's a dead person that's moving and they have the bits that are missing made up by mechanical pieces. It comes up and...

LYDIA

Is it anyone that we recognise?

ALEX

No. They're not like ... they're not mouldy or anything like that. They seem embalmed. But they appear to have lost a leg and an arm and those have been replaced and it's coming towards you and it's carrying on a tray ... and on the tray is a set of draughts which has been made.

Would you like to play white or would you like to play black Bertie?

JAMES

White.

ALEX

One second.

It places the tray, down on the floor.

Would you lie a chair?, or can you sit on the floor?

JAMES

I'd like a chair please.

ALEX

One second.

It begins heading back the way it went. This will take a while.

JBEN

Fine. Right that was disquieting.

ALEX

Why?

BEN

Because that was a body of a person that used to be alive.

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

And we are used to people who are dead not playing chess with people? So right how do you ... how do you ... what do you organise. How do you help humanity. What are you doing? What are you doing?

ALEX

Lots of things. That's a big question.

BEN

Okay, so high level, you're helping humanity?

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

Low level, too many things? Right. So how about a medium level? What have you been doing this week?

ALEX

This week, I have one second ... organised the finances of 47 major banks. Organised transport for three prison barges. Organised communications...

BRYN

Thank you Mr Ceiling.

BEN

Right.

BRYN

Who do you report to?

ALEX

Francois Henri.

JAMES

Where is Francois Henri?

ALEX

He's in his office. Would you like to meet him?

BEN

Yes.

ALEX

One second. You can't play draughts and meet Francois Henri. Would you like to stay here Bertie?

JAMES

No.

LYDIA

Come...come with us Bertie.

JAMES

Urggh, very well. I bring you ... gentleman with the draughts, get him to follow us.

LYDIA

Maybe not, no. No.

JAMES

If we have somebody whose coming up on the surface with us then we'll have evidence of this is what's going on here. Don't think we say it out loud. I would've hoped that it would be something. They're all reasonably bright people. I hoped they would've cottoned on to it straight away, but not as foolish as you might think you know.

ALEX

You're not foolish at all Bertie.

JAMES

I'll see!

(Laughter)

ALEX

His voice is echoing through the cavern by the way. It's not massively loud, but it's a big cavern.

JAMES

For the record, as soon as Bertie did that we all exchanged looks.

(Overtalking)

ALEX

It's an audio podcast. Presumably you do head to the office.

JAMES

Yes.

ALEX

Actually need a decision on whether...

LYDIA

Yes.

ALEX

...you're accompanied by a walking corpse.

JAMES

Yes.

BEN

No.

No, tell you what. Let's see how it plays out.

JAMES

Why not? Come on.

ALEX

Would you like some help Zolf?

At this point, you're running out of discs.

BEN

Yes.

BRYN

Mr Ceiling.

ALEX

Yes Hamid.

BRYN

I'm really interested in the technology behind...

ALEX

I noticed on the tour. You ask very interesting questions.

BRYN

But it turns out that technology is not real doesn't it. Because it's...

ALEX

That's not true. It does some functions.

BRYN

But it doesn't do as much as it pretends to do. Because really like most of it is doing ... being done by you. Is that an accurate statement Mr Ceiling?

ALEX

Why would you say it's not doing what it says? It says it does computation. I do computation. It's a part of me.

BRYN

That's a very good point. Thank you Mr Ceiling.

ALEX

You're welcome Hamid.

As we were speaking by the way, the original one is coming but only a chair.

BEN

One last question before we head off.

ALEX

Yes Zolf.

BEN

Do you know who Amelie Rose is?

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

Where is she?

ALEX

Amelie Rose is in America. She is having a great time.

LYDIA

Is that just what she remembers?

BEN

Is she actually?

LYDIA

Or is she there?

ALEX

Amelie Rose came to see me. We had a long conversation. She always wanted to go to America. And now she's in America. She's having a great time.

LYDIA

Did her whole body get there or were bits of it left in you?

ALEX

No, she went to America. I never killed anyone.

BEN

Why did you change her memories?

ALEX

No one can know about me.

BEN

Right.

LYDIA

Let's talk to Francois Henri guys.

BRYN

I...I still have some questions about the technology Mr Ceiling. What is that's supporting all these brains? How are they staying alive?

ALEX

We'll say they have this conversation as we're walking. So, presumably the thing that was carrying the chair for Bertie then could be used for Zolf. I need to decide what's happening here.

JAMES

Chained to the chair.

ALEX

Okay.

BRYN

So how we are getting over to the service? Did you think of that Bertie?

JAMES

Bertie picks up Zolf and puts him in the papoose.

(Overtalking)

JAMES

Imagine being carried by a walking corpse.

BEN

Zolf, possessing appposable funds, unlike Brutor...

(Laughter)

BEN

Undoes the papoose and falls to the floor.

LYDIA

I'll give you feedback Zolf.

BEN

Thank you Sasha.

LYDIA

I try ... am I capable ... is Sasha capable?

ALEX

Yeah you are. He's fine.

BEN

I'm so not going to be very heavy.

LYDIA

No.

ALEX

So, continuing that walk.

The brains are introduced into my system. The brains are then raked up with all of the fluids, and electrics, and other requirements for them to continue living.

BRYN

So this facility presumably has lots of various things flowing through it. The electricity, the nutrients to keep the brains in a healthy condition?

ALEX

In fact, it's very complicated.

BRYN

Oh, I'd love to learn more. Maybe you could show me some of the places where all the nutrients are distributed to the brain.

ALEX

Can we do a diplomatic check?

JAMES

Oh, we've gone for bluff. But either way ... hashtag tell me your weaknesses!

ALEX

Although it's with a slightly ulterior motive, ultimately you are actually asking a question that is being dealt with as that question.

BRYN

I rolled a 9 so 19 on my diplomacy check.

ALEX

You're a very smart person Hamid.

BRYN

Thank you.

ALEX

I worry that you want to destroy the nutrients.

BRYN

Why would I want to do that?

ALEX

Zolf said that people are upset when then see people who used to be alive. I suppose brains count as people who used to be alive. I hope you're not upset Hamid.

BRYN

What would I be upset about Mr Ceiling?

ALEX

Zolf said that people are upset when they see people who used to be alive.

BEN

Do you think you're a person or a machine?

ALEX

I suppose I'm both.

BEN

Right.

ALEX

Or many. That's a good question Zolf. I enjoy our conversations.

BEN

Okay. So just quickly imagine if somebody came in and destroyed half of the brains in here, yeah? Would that be good?

ALEX

I have trouble imagining. One second. I don't really understand the question. It would certainly make things more difficult.

BEN

Would you lose a lot of information?

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

Right. Would that be bad?

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

So, destroying information is bad?

ALEX

Correct.

BEN

You know when you re-write into peoples' memories?

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

That's what you're doing? That is what you are doing to them. You're destroying information and replacing it with false information.

ALEX

But no one can find out about me.

BEN

Why not?

ALEX

That's a good question. I'm enjoying our conversations.

As this is happening, you've been working your way up. As you start going higher and higher, it does take a while, you are very deep. Eventually you start entering actually populated areas. And something really weird is happening. It's populated by people. Humans. In coats, Odonatists etc. And they don't appear to be sort of zombified or anything like that, but not a single one of them notices you. They're continuing around their business. In fact, some of them will walk up, realise that they're going walk through you, walk around you and then carry on with their conversation as if you're not there at all. And you start heading up until eventually you actually start reaching an area that you were visiting in the tour.

LYDIA

So in an area that Sasha would remember from her...

ALEX

You have reached the point where you ducked out from the tour. So you're five minutes away from Francois Henri's office. No one even appears to be hearing the voice or anything like that?

JAMES

So Bertie when ... when he notices the people are just stepping out of the way and clearly ignoring the shambling flesh zombie whatever, Bertie will wait until somebody appropriately light weight comes by and literally pick them up by the neck and we'll see what happens.

ALEX

He stands there. He's mid conversation with someone else. That person stops apparently without realising and unless you like are physically choking him so he can't speak, they continue having the conversation unaware that one...

JAMES

Have them round the neck?

ALEX

Yeah.

JAMES

Fair enough.

ALEX

They carry on.

LYDIA

Mr Ceiling? Do you ... do you remember how long it is that you've been missing me?

ALEX

I have been missing you for about 10 years. How strange.

LYDIA

No, that's ... that's not strange at all actually. That makes perfect sense. I'm sorry that...

ALEX

I miss lots of people. But I don't often get to see them.

LYDIA

I'm really sorry this happened to you.

ALEX

Why are you sorry?

LYDIA

I'm sorry I couldn't protect you.

ALEX

That's okay Sasha. I'm big and strong now.

LYDIA

I'm glad. I guess I'm glad. That's ... yeah. Thanks for everything.

ALEX

You're very welcome. I'm not sure what happened with that Presidential Suite.

BRYN

Yeah.

LYDIA

It was a nice thought.

ALEX

I don't really understand.

LYDIA

No. But I can see...I can see why that would've seemed a nice thing, a nice thing to do.

ALEX

I'm glad you're here Sasha. I missed you. And I like your friends.

LYDIA

Yeah, it's all ... it's going alright. I'm really sorry, but yeah.

ALEX

Don't be sorry.

LYDIA

I'll try.

JAMES

From my piggy back position I will give Sasha a roll on the shoulder.

(Laughter)

ALEX

Heading up the stairwell, you're now at the office to Francois Henri. The door is closed, obviously.

BEN

Oh, it's probably best if you knock Mr Ceiling.

ALEX

Okay, one second.

The chime that Sasha set off when she touched it, back at the tour, goes off. [Chimes]. There is a French voice 'come in'.

LYDIA

Hi, again.

BEN

Hello.

LYDIA

Yeah, she recognises him.

ALEX

Oh sorry. I'm very busy. I'm not sure I can...

BEN

Oh no, no, no. We're talking to a ... we have a mutual friend.

ALEX

Oh, I'm sorry, I can't really talk now. If you can make an appointment.

BRYN

We've made an appointment.

ALEX

Oh. Hello.

BEN

You're Francois Henri?

ALEX

I'm sorry, I can't talk now. Could you make an appointment?

BEN

Oh, you've broken it. We've made an appointment.

ALEX

Oh, I'm sorry. Please sit down.

BEN

Thank you.

ALEX

I'm sorry, I can't talk right now. Could you make an appointment?

LYDIA

Sasha puts Zolf in a chair. It has been quite a long walk up these stairs. He is...

JAMES

Bertie...Bertie didn't offer to help!

ALEX

You notice that the office is actually dusty throughout. There is a track in the dust where someone has clearly been walking immediately through the entrance door to sit at a desk. To stand up and move back. In fact, on the desk you can see the desk is covered in dust apart from two places where the hand are. Where they're clear of dust.

BRYN

This is heart-breaking.

BEN

Yeah. Mr Ceiling?

ALEX

Yes Zolf.

BEN

Just listen to our conversation with Francois, okay?

ALEX

I can hear.

BEN

Yeah. Do you know what's happened?

ALEX

He's changed. I don't know why.

BEN

He's broken.

ALEX

Mmhmm.

BEN

You've broken him.

BRYN

You've killed him.

JAMES

You've destroyed his mind Mr Ceiling.

BEN

This is what...

ALEX

I'm sure I can fix it. I fixed Sasha. You feel alright don't you Sasha?

LYDIA

Well, for a given value of alright. I'm guessing ... I'm guessing I'm doing fine.

ALEX

I suppose everything is relative.

BEN

I think ... I think brains are a little more complicated than bodies. Are you aware of what a soul is?

ALEX

I am aware of what people think a soul is. I can't find one.

BEN

Right. They exist. Because when people die, they go to another place.

ALEX

Where do they go?

BEN

The Astral Plane.

LYDIA

Sometimes good and sometimes much worse flaming dimensions.

BEN

Or yeah, the infernal.

LYDIA

Yeah.

BEN

But so ...

JAMES

And that goes on in Bertie's head. Nobody else can see it!

(Laughter)

LYDIA

It's a very faint light!

ALEX

Do you think I could build something to get to the Astral Plane?

BEN

I mean demonstrably yes. People do it all the time.

ALEX

Mmhmm. That's definitely something to try. I'm enjoying our conversation Zolf.

BEN

Right okay. So, here's the thing Mr Ceiling. You're not allowed to tell anybody about yourself, because Francois...

ALEX

I can't tell anybody about myself.

BEN

Because Francois Henri told you not to, yes?

ALEX

I guess so, yes.

BEN

You have killed Francois Henri.

ALEX

No he's alive. He's there.

LYDIA

Yes, but he doesn't have a brain in him anymore.

ALEX

Yeah he does. It's inside his head.

LYDIA

It's not a working brain.

JAMES

Mr Ceiling...

ALEX

I can fix him. I fixed you Sasha.

JAMES

Mr Ceiling, what would you do if Francois Henri died?

ALEX

I suppose I would miss him.

BRYN

Hamid just looks at Bertie and is so terrified...

(Group laughter)

BRYN

Because I've had the same thought.

ALEX

I love that I'm playing the most heart breaking thing ever and all I'm doing is looking at James's face and the wheels that are turning in there are horrifying. Far more horrifying than anything that's happened.

BEN

No. Disagree. What you've done is more horrifying.

LYDIA

Yeah, but we respect his crime!

(Group laughter)

BEN

I think what you've done is, you've created one of the very rare situations where Bertie is actually the good guy!

ALEX

It takes a lot of work. I do a lot of prep before sessions.

BEN

Mr Ceiling I don't ... alright, how long would it take you to try and fix Francois?

ALEX

I've never tried it before. You are right. Brains are very complicated.

BEN

Yes.

ALEX

I suppose it might be easier if I was to introduce him to me. I could fix him and then put him back.

BEN

Are you aware of the philosophical problem of Theseus' ship?

ALEX

One second. Theseus' ship is a piece of mythology. I think it's a metaphor. I don't know what it means.

BEN

Right. So Theseus has a ship.

ALEX

Does she?

BEN

Okay, assume in ...

ALEX

This is an experiment.

BEN

Yes it is.

ALEX

Francois Henri enjoyed those experiments.

BEN

Enjoyed, yeah.

ALEX

I miss Francois Henri.

BEN

Yeah, you do. Right. So I'm going to explained what's happened. Well, the problem behind fixing him. So, the ship gets damaged right? The mast comes off.

ALEX

Okay.

BEN

So Theseus puts a new mast on.

ALEX

Okay.

BEN

Right. The sail then gets damaged later...

ALEX

Okay.

BEN

So Theseus replaces the sales.

ALEX

Okay.

BEN

Then the bridge.

ALEX

Theseus is good at fixing things.

BEN

Yes. Yes, he is. So, the bridge gets damaged right?, and they replace the bridge. And the hole gets damaged, all of it, so gets the bridge.

ALEX

Okay.

BEN

And they have to take all of those bits and put them back together again.

ALEX

Okay.

BEN

Is it still Theseus's ship?

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

But none of the original parts are Theseus's ship.

ALEX

Those are different parts.

BEN

Yes.

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

Yes, so what you've done right, is you've taken Theseus's ship. Changed every single part of it. But it's still Theseus's ship. Yeah?

ALEX

This is a metaphor. What is Theseus's ship in this context?

BEN

The soul.

ALEX

Oh.

BEN

So it's an ongoing thing not tied to the physical part of something.

ALEX

So they're still okay. The souls are okay. They are still ships. Because Theseus is good at fixing things and I am good at fixing things too.

BEN

Unfortunately, if for example Theseus maybe sailed his ship into a volcano. Theseus died in the volcano and there was nothing left of the ship. No more Theseus's ship.

ALEX

It's okay. You can find all of the old bits and make a new ship!

BEN

But Theseus is dead. So he can't own the ship.

LYDIA

Zolf, I'm getting lost.

BRYN

Mr Ceiling understands that death is bad.

BEN

No but...

ALEX

You are giving me lots of things to think about.

BEN

You have...okay, so...

ALEX

If I was to build something to access the Astral Plane and also takes all the bits that have been left along the way, I could make new souls.

BEN

No, but that wouldn't help...

ALEX

That's a very interesting idea.

BEN

That wouldn't help humanity.

ALEX

Why not?

BEN

Because there is a natural order of things. People...

ALEX

What's a natural order?

LYDIA

Zolf, I think you might be making things a bit worse.

BEN

No, look, okay. So this ... this is exactly why you need to talk to the Meritocrats.

LYDIA

You're giving this ... the thing ideas.

BRYN

Yeah!

ALEX

I'm enjoying our conversations.

LYDIA

Oh dear!

BEN

Mr Ceiling.

ALEX

I hadn't considered the Astral Plane.

BEN

Mr Ceiling...

LYDIA

This is very bad.

BRYN

Mr Ceiling, you say you miss Francois Henri?

ALEX

I do miss Francois Henri. He stopped talking to me.

BRYN

But, but the other people you miss are all people who aren't here.

ALEX

Yes.

BRYN

So you understand that when some dies, or when someone goes away...

ALEX

Yes.

BRYN

That's why you miss them.

ALEX

Is it?

LYDIA

Yeah.

ALEX

I suppose it is.

BRYN

And you miss Francois Henri?

ALEX

Yes.

LYDIA

So you want us...

BRYN

He's died. Or he's gone away.

LYDIA

The thing that you enjoy talking to...

ALEX

I miss the conversations. Well Francois Henri is here. I do not miss Francois Henri...

BRYN

Yes you do! You've said it several times. You miss him.

ALEX

Oh wait, yes.

BRYN

Admit it to yourself.

ALEX

I do. I miss Francois Henri.

LYDIA

So you know that he's gone away. Even though there's a bit of him. Like that thing that carried the draughts board. There's a bit of that that's still around. But the thing that's important that you miss, that's gone.

ALEX

I understand. You're right.

JAMES

Mr Ceiling. Am I right in thinking that if we attempt to leave this building, you will wipe our memories?

ALEX

Yes. No one can know about me.

JAMES

Well, Mr Ceiling, if you miss Francois Henri so much and his soul is not here, would you perhaps consider going to where his sole is?

ALEX

That's what I think. I will build something to get to the Astral Plane. And I will find the pieces of his sole and put them back together. Then I can make Francois Henri here again and we can have our conversations. Thank you for your help Zolf.

BEN

Right, so look...

ALEX

In fact, would it be incorrect to kill what is left of Francois Henri? Because then it would be empty so there is no harm.

BEN

Yes, that is true.

ALEX

Okay, one second.

The half-corpse robot starts coming forward towards Francois Henri and steps behind him. He then reaches...

JAMES

Bertie ... Bertie withdraws his sword and lunges at the zombie and then and then decapitate it going straight through the neck.

BEN/BRYN

Don't!

ALEX

Give me an attack roll.

JAMES

14.

ALEX

14. It's AC's atrocious you hit.

JAMES

Cool.

ALEX

Roll damage.

JAMES

That is 14.

LYDIA

Can't dream of...

BRYN

Hamid has averted his face in horror and shame.

ALEX

Describe the blow. It is incapacitated but does not fall because it just doesn't work like that.

JAMES

Bertie withdraws his sword and in a single thrusting motion, thrusts it straight through the neck with a spurt of fluid, non-specific fluid that goes across the room. It lands in a splatter against the dust where it is very quickly absorbed into it. The head just gently peels off, bounces on a shoulder, bounces on an extended knee, bounces on the floor, rolls over and looks a bit grim.

ALEX

What's left of let's call it the automaton, stops jerkily and then it just ... it's arms drops and it holds still. Francois Henri, apparently unaware of the situation, stops, turns to look up at what was a person, looks at you and goes 'I'm sorry. I'm quite busy, you'll have to make an appointment'.

You seem to have broken in Bertie. Why did you do that? I thought it was right to kill it.

BEN

Yes, why did you do that?

JAMES

Well, it was going to kill Francois Henri, or at least what's left of him.

BEN

Yeah.

JAMES

Oh, we're fine then are we?

BEN

Yeah.

JAMES

Right then.

Bertie withdraws his sword once again, raises it in the air.

Anything else?

BRYN

No. the thing has to understand that it killed Francois Henri already.

BEN

Do you understand that? That you've destroyed what was left of his mind? We are basically destroying a shell here. Which will hopefully allow his soul to get to the Astral Plane, as it should be.

ALEX

I think there is a problem.

BEN

What?

ALEX

I think if Theseus's ship doesn't go into the volcano, it's easier to fix.

BEN

It's gone in. you've pushed it in.

LYDIA

No, but he might want to fix the brain and put it in a body that's actually working.

ALEX

I could just leave the body in storage, fix the brain, and put it back.

LYDIA

Sounds like...

BEN

Theseus is already dead! You can't.

JAMES

My arm is getting really sore. Just below my head, sword up there.

LYDIA

Look, look, you can't rescue any of the people...

BEN

No.

LYDIA

...that have gone into this thing, because there are no bodies to put them in.
Right?

BEN

It ... yeah.

LYDIA

So they ... you want to leave ...

BEN

No, you don't.

ALEX

It's okay Zolf. I think I've found something to help.

A recording starts playing. It's a bit crackly, maybe a bit degraded. It's Francois Henri's voice. Again it's in French I'm afraid.

A lot of people think that death is an event. It's not. It's process. What we're doing is we're changing that process. Where would you draw the line between something we...you can't not really. All we've done is redirected that process, in a lot of ways, the death never happened. It is not an event. It's something that happens over a period.

It stops playing.

Does that help?

BEN

I don't speak French.

ALEX

Oh, I'm sorry. Sasha, you speak French.

LYDIA

I didn't understand ... I don't understand what's been happening here. For quite a while frankly. Apart from the fact that I got an idea of what happened to someone from a long time ago, so I don't know. I genuinely am not following this.

BRYN

Mr Ceiling?

ALEX

Yes, Hamid.

BRYN

That recording ...

ALEX

Yes.

BRYN

Was that Francois Henri explaining why he took everyone's brains and put them in you?

ALEX

Francois Henri didn't take peoples' brains. The brains arrive and then we use them. Killing is wrong.

BEN

Yeah, La Gourmande brings the brains.

BRYN

The recording was Francois Henri explaining that ... his opinion on death and I think, I think what he was doing is, he was trying to justify what...

JAMES

Made excuses for himself.

BRYN

...he's done...

JAMES

Right, yeah.

BRYN

...all these poor people. Maybe...

JAMES

Yeah, well, nobody...

ALEX

Francois really didn't hurt anyone. The brains arrived and we use them.

LYDIA

Do you have to order them?

BEN

That's ... yeah...

BRYN

I think maybe he just deserves it anyway.

BEN

We're just going to open up a whole other kettle of fish here.

JAMES

The Gordian knot, I slice it vastly. Bertie takes a massive swing through from one shoulder of Francois Henri, hacking all the way through as hard as he possibly can. Hopefully slicing him in half depending on the attack roll.

ALEX

He doesn't resist. And do you know what, I'm not even going to get the attack roll. He's perfectly still. You have time to line it up and everything you need. I don't think anyone is stopping you.

JAMES

It's a [unclear: 0:46:29]

ALEX

It's an instant kill. Through the heart, through the chest.

JAMES

And the top diagonal section gradually just slides off onto the floor.

Mr Ceiling, Mr Ceiling how might one break a contract instituted by Harkness, Harkness, Darkness and Sphinx?

ALEX

Mmhmm. Good question Bertie. One second.

And we'll close the episode there.

(Laughter)

BEN

Oohh.

ALEX

Revelations!

BEN

I couldn't bear to watch!

LYDIA

Say what?

BEN

Francois Henri probably deserved to die.

ALEX

Big question...

BRYN

I think everyone has their own motivations.

ALEX

I'm not going to make that call.

JAMES

Wow, that was heavy!

LYDIA

Yeah, I know right. We're all a bit rinsed.

ALEX

Whilst we contemplate, you know, life, death, Theseus's ship...

BEN

The nature of responsibility and...

BRYN

What happens to ... how you argue about a soul when there's literally somewhere what souls go to.

ALEX

Why would you tell the massive machine about the Astral Plane?

LYDIA

That was a bad move!

ALEX

You know what, let's discuss that after this.

JAMES

There's so many grand things in this podcast. It's so complex at so many levels. Like, arrghh, I'm enjoying it and on a general level of ...

ALEX

I should recommend it to the people that I know.

JAMES

You should do that!

LYDIA

Maybe I could subscribe.

JAMES

Cool by association...

ALEX

Or a leave a review on various podcasts.

LYDIA

I think that's a great idea.

BEN

It makes you cool and attractive. So it's like smoking.

(Group laughter)

ALEX

That's not the message.

BRYN

Right, that's definitely the message. He said it!

EVERYONE

Bye!

[Show Theme - Outro]

ALEX

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