

RQG – 149 – The Machinery of Evil

Content Warnings

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ALEX

Hi everyone, Alex here. I'd just like to take a moment to thank some of patrons. Alex Olason, Sam Lidiat, Jessica Conrad, Amanda Whitehouse, Smuthri McGanty, Greyson, Selina Yu, KC Milheizer, Destiny Catherine, Meg Tumny, Sara Elmorpin, Nicholas Glover, Kailey Prussic, Alex 1000 Beetles in a Trenchcoat Bletz, Isobel Wilson, Trea Fro, Shannon Clark, Caitlin Borgmann, Ripley King, Patreonoid Android. Thank you all. We really appreciate your support. If you'd like to join them go to www.patreon.com/rustyquill and take a look at our rewards.

[Show Theme - Intro]

ALEX

Hello and welcome to episode 149 of the Rusty Quill Gaming podcast. I'm your host and GM Alex Newall and with me today, I have

BEN

Ben Meredith

BRYN

Bryn Monroe

LYDIA

Lydia Nicholas

HELEN

And Helen Gould

ALEX

And who are you playing?

BEN

Zolf Smith

BRYN

Hamid Saleh Haroun al-Tahan

LYDIA

Still the birthday girl!

ALEX

Your birthday will last a 1000 years.

BRYN

Let's not do the Daniel Barker birthday all over again!

LYDIA

Oh no!

ALEX

And because twice in a row because we've managed to cut you off you managed to get the words out.

HELEN

Azu

BEN

Because we're all excited about the second week of Lydia's birthday.

ALEX

Now interestingly we're going to pick up exactly where we...exactly pretty much where we started last week.

(laughing)

BEN

Oh yes sorry Alex. We'll pick up the pace.

HELEN

We did some bonding over Harrison Campbell.

ALEX

You're so close to getting fatigue checks for every hour that you're awake.

BEN

It doesn't matter I can cure it all!

ALEX

I know! But I just like the idea that you genuinely all do become a magic/drug fuelled nightmare that just never stops! As a cleric you're basically just steroiding people to keep going at this point.

BEN

Cel's offered me drugs!

ALEX

I know.

LYDIA

No I offered you potions!

BEN

Cel's offered me drugs!

ALEX

Like I said you're now just...

BRYN

Magic drugs!

ALEX

I mean from the outside looking in, I feel bad for Wilde who's like I'd like you to meet my team and they're like a roided up...

BEN

They're just tweaked out

ALEX

Tweaked out complete mess.

BEN

To save the world.

ALEX

To save the world.

LYDIA

Yeah and I mean Cel basically has extracts that you do that.

ALEX

Like mechanically I know these things don't work like this. You guys are shaving years off your life every session.

LYDIA

I got a lot of those!

BRYN

Same!

ALEX

Right with that in mind I am going to come back in, which was you were looking at Shoin's diary, I believe.

HELEN

Yeah and you were looking to see if he liked you.

LYDIA

Well I mean, like why would he be so up in my business. I just don't understand. I kept saying no, go away from the village and he was like I'm just going to send my goons.

BRYN

Some men just don't understand boundaries.

HELEN

Yeah it's not actually an indication of them liking you. That's a bad...miss...I've forgotten my words.

LYDIA

We used to chat alchemy and I met him and he was a strange one. Anyway, ooh diary.

ALEX

So it is a full diary. A hefty, wadge of a book...

LYDIA

Start at the back.

ALEX

Start at the back?

LYDIA

Well at the...

ALEX

No, it's a good idea.

LYDIA

I assume he was writing in a Japanese style. The back is the beginning.

ALEX

Well, no the back is the front.

LYDIA

Argh! I will read the earliest entry where he's setting out, one assumes, what he expects from the diary and then I will flick to the last one.

ALEX

Ok really sensible. Really sensible, great.

LYDIA

He says things like that when something really bad's going to happen so it's one of those you read and you have just read...

BRYN

This is episode 149. It's episode 150 where we can't trust anything that happens!

ALEX

You have saved me passing an entire book across 20 minutes. So it's all good. So the opening is exactly what you would expect. To give like a loose translation, something along the lines of...

LYDIA

These are my memoirs I'm so important!

ALEX

No you know what...

BEN

Sorry, can you just have a character with that voice. I love that!

ALEX

The Japanese equivalent of, and he would write like this, something along the lines of herein, thou might findest, the accounts of Yoshida Shoin. He has written in an ancient imperial mode for a start.

BEN

He's Garth Marengi.

ALEX

And he has basically written...

LYDIA

Ahhh! That's...(laughing)

BEN

Oh no Alex is given us a passbook

BRYN

As played by Richard Ayoade.

BEN

Thinker, dreamy weaver, lover.

ALEX

So what you need to be aware is this isn't Garth Marengi what this is, is just Garth Marengi's Darkplace compressed into a single NPC. So it is completely florid god damn nonsense and it is clear that this was meant to be published at some point.

LYDIA

It's sort of like a version...

BEN

Simply the thoughts and feelings of a young girl and consequently meant for publication.

LYDIA

Cel explains, so this is just basically, it's melodramatic trash. I don't see why anyone would read that kind of thing.

BRYN

The shade! The shade!

BEN

I just look at Azu.

HELEN

Yeah Azu looks back like...

BEN

Solidarity.

HELEN

We know!

ALEX

Skipping to the end, they aren't Japanese. They might be, like a child's copy of Japanese pictographs

HELEN

Oh dear.

ALEX

It isn't really pictographs. There's a decent number of sketches in there. The latest sketches are extremely abstract. It is...

BRYN

Are the entries dated?

ALEX

At first problematically so. 16th March...3pm. 3:03pm a new thought has occurred.

(laughing)

At the end some of the drawings cross over pages and there are no dates of any kind. You suddenly realise now that you can hold literally hold it up and go flip book style and watch it start fine, fine, fine, fine and then about two thirds of the way through it just real quick turns into honestly like geometric patterns. Very abstract.

LYDIA

The obvious to ask, Cel will summarise that...it degrades clearly. I'm just going to hunt through and try and work out what exactly was happening at the point where he began to degrade because something is happening to his thinking. I mean look at that. That kind of abstract geometry is not doing any favours.

BRYN

Really stark difference yeah.

BEN

Yeah good point, is it the veins, is it something else? Is it whatever he's been doing to his brain?

LYDIA

I mean if you have too many channel figures, you can end up beginning to try and think in too many dimensions.

ALEX

Can you roll me a...either a perception or linguistics. I don't mind which.

LYDIA

Perception

ALEX

This is just for you to, like how well you as parsing down into something.

LYDIA

ALEX

19. Ok cool. You skip and notice that the first sort of major transition happens at the halfway point. The halfway point of the diary goes from stuff like I was telling the Prime Ministerial candidate of the 17th prefecture the other day about blah, blah, blah to basically going like “eureka” and becomes all shop, no fluff. It stops being a piece for publication and starts being an actual diary and he is fulsome. He goes into huge amounts of detail which I am going to parse down for you because otherwise I’m just explaining how stuff works and it’s fictional. These machines don’t work guys. I can’t explain how they work because they’re not real.

BRYN

Partially powered by magic.

ALEX

It doesn’t work so I can’t.

BEN

And a wizard did it.

ALEX

At some point it does boil down to because magic. But in there it effectively states the following and I’m just going to kind of bullet point it. He has been interested in, he genuinely uses the phrase “expanding his consciousness” beyond the limitations of his material form. He’s utterly convinced that he can do it and at the halfway point he has. He realises that he has built that chair in

the table and he successfully, for a short period of time, hooked him up into his entire infrastructure. He goes off for a while talking about what it's like to see from a thousand eyes, hear from a thousand ears.

LYDIA

Oh no!

ALEX

And breathe through the very fires of the earth. It goes very poetic and there's a brief moment where he like...

LYDIA

For a while I would say the Cel is like commenting on that and then they just start reading quite intensely in a very...in a much more like ooh.

ALEX

When he's talking about that by the way all of that fluff goes away. It's actually really well written and he's clearly had, what as close can be described, as a transcendent experience. He's genuinely affected by this.

HELEN

He had magic mushrooms.

ALEX

Yeah I mean...

BEN

He's literally had a transcendent experience.

ALEX

Yeah. So he is like this isn't just the future for me. This is the future for everyone.

HELEN

Oh god.

LYDIA

The sort of thing that will be happening, Cel will be commenting like oh and then he's talking to a Prime Minister and then ha, he's talking about expanding his consciousness, like anyone would want to do that. Ha, and then he's doing this and then...no more comments and their eyes get closer and closer to the book.

BEN

Cel! What are you reading?

ALEX

I shall keep going there's far more to give. Alchemically speaking at first he starts to have a couple of enormously profound insights where it's like ok. While that would make a 15 year brew take 15 minutes, interesting. Then he just abandons alchemy and starts talking about how utterly it's irrelevant beyond the means to achieve this kind of transcendence. As it goes on though

it becomes apparent that phase one was rigging himself up to his infrastructure. Ok. Phase two was being able to sustain that. He placed himself in this basically sealed bubble because frankly he needed to make sure that his meaty vessel didn't crap out on him. That was it. And the best way to do that is to make sure that he's in a sealed bubble. He does start to go off on one at one point where he discovers a cave system and basically mentions that all of his labour problems are solved.

BEN

Oh yes ok.

ALEX

He literally doesn't go into it more than, well that's that problem solved. Back to achieving consciousness beyond the realms of mere mortals. You also notice there's a slight evil twinge in that his thinking's very much whoever gets to do this first pretty much gets to control how other people access this kind of thing. So that's kind of where the long term philosophical money is as it were.

BEN

So Garth Marengi by way of Mark Zuckerberg.

HELEN

Oh! That's a bad combination.

ALEX

This is getting very messy. As it proceeds, phase two very, very simply was, like I said, making it sustainable which he achieved. Phase three was it would be better to just be able to check into my meat body occasionally but spend most of my time here. So he managed that apparently. And then last but not least he was like look, flesh takes feeding, toilets are a hassle.

LYDIA

Cel's while reading this has a slight and is just nodding sympathetically.

ALEX

Really inefficient. Like he had a knee twinge and how are you meant to think when you have a knee twinge. The solution there is to not have knees.

LYDIA

Cel is nodding and shrugging as if this was a conversation.

BEN

Same, same. Big mood showing.

HELEN

Yeah. #relatable

(laughing)

BRYN

Does this mean...I don't know if this is an in character question or an out of character question, that the body that exploded was actually Shoin's body?

ALEX

That's a good question

BEN

No it's smeared across the floor so I don't think we're going to get the answer now.

LYDIA

It was dressed as a cleric.

BEN

It looked like one of the party

ALEX

So as it continues he basically box ticked...it sort of starts to go wrong from here really where the handwriting starts to degrade. He hasn't gone completely cuckoo, bananas but nonetheless like the handwriting is starting to get a big awkward and he's mentioning that he's trying to jump back into the body but it just...it doesn't really move at the speed that he needs it to and it keeps...it's getting thinner so he's spending a lot more time in the mechanical body. He's basically making upgrades to it of course. And then he has another sort of brainwave which is where he's limited himself to a single static facility

and that's nonsense. That's absolute nonsense. The real solution here is to make stuff that can go out into the world so it can experience more of it.

HELEN

Oh no!

ALEX

And he reckons, he actually managed to uncover a basically a body on the seabed that he reckons mechanically, shape wise, he can pretty much model off. It's ideal. It could probably travel quite far.

BEN

So Shoin isn't controlling the squids. He is the squid.

ALEX

That would be really, really sensible but he does mention as well that ideally he'd want them to be networked. Who wants to be trapped in one. Either be all of them or none of them so he starts focusing a lot on that.

BRYN

How did he network them? Is that detail in there?

BEN

Some sort of blue ray deal-y

LYDIA

Maybe that's the weather.

ALEX

Absolutely he does go into how they networking. He does mention...I'm doing this a little bit out of order, Francois Henri did appear in the earlier days and was giving a little bit of help in the initial phase of, how do I get from brain to infrastructure but he very much leaves Francois Henri's stuff behind because frankly, in the diary, between you and I, it was a dim man.

(laughing)

BEN

Wow, yeah. He just built an organic neural network. What an idiot!

ALEX

Yeah exactly. So he appears to have continued this work. That was the lighthouse was for. He literally just goes ah! Massive lighthouse, I can just use that. I'll probably need a redundant power system. A phrase that'll probably crop up. And then last but not least he's starting to get a bit bored and people have started to nose around as his empire has spread. There is a footnote mention of you.

BRYN

Ah

LYDIA

Ooh an annoyance.

ALEX

That is the sum total.

LYDIA

Ah! He did care!

(laughing)

ALEX

He has delegated pretty much all of his earthly concerns at this point to minions because frankly the infrastructure's built to take care of itself. Why would he need them. Then he...people start turning up. People keep trying to investigate so he has a bit of fun. Why not? He keeps starting to reference the book that was on the bedside table. Always was his favourite. He couldn't help himself.

HELEN

Oh no!

ALEX

Then things go really weird when one of the parties he's quite happy with...you seem to think he's had about five or six by this point...all of them failed.

BRYN

He was a dungeon boss and adventuring parties kept trying to raid his dungeon.

ALEX

Absolutely.

BEN

He's playing Dungeon Keeper.

BRYN

He is! He's playing Dungeon Keeper.

HELEN

And he was loving it. It was his favourite thing.

LYDIA

But one of the people that came had the blue veins and so that infected him. That is what the cleric was.

ALEX

So here's how the narrative goes. He was having a whale of a time because he's just like, listen, being transcendent is great but it's nice to take a load off, climb inside your big brain orb and just design some new traps for people to make for you. It's a good way to kick back.

HELEN

He's Jigsaw!

ALEX

Then things go really weird where, for the first time in ages, one of the clerics made it all the way to the puzzle table. Plugs him in and has a nice little direct conversation because obviously you do.

BRYN

Brain to brain.

ALEX

Naturally. Why wouldn't you. At which point...

BRYN

Seems more efficient than those flappy meat sounds.

ALEX

At which point the kind of, degrade, ooh. Gets very, very steep.

BEN

So sorry...little bit of simultaneous action, when Cel starts to do that I start to hunt for the holy symbol that the cleric had.

ALEX

Yeah that's fine, that's fine.

LYDIA

So you said there is something weird in the cleric. Right, the veins.

BEN

The cleric's got the veins.

HELEN

They have...yeah, they're infected.

LYDIA

So that's the point that...

BEN

Yeah

LYDIA

So Shoin was not...because I was thinking, maybe he was the source of...

BEN

So Shoin was protecting himself.

LYDIA

...but no he was...the blue veins came to him and relatively recently really in the scheme of things.

ALEX

Yeah. So far as you can tell in terms of dates, probably within the last six months or so. What happens is emotion returns to the man. He talks a little bit less about transcending the coils of these mere material flesh forms and a little bit more like, I'm going to have to take some immediate action. He's afraid basically. He's afraid of what's happening. And then he seems to have another breakthrough. He's managed to halt it.

LYDIA

So he mutilated what remained of himself?

ALEX

He says two things which are the key takeaways, which is me closing out this diary. Number one, he says that he's managed to halt it. The cost is high but worth it and the second thing is, he believes that he has the means to transmit his solution across to the remainder of his network. However he prays that he retains enough of himself that he might be able to enact this. And then it just...

BEN

Garbage.

ALEX

Garbage. Initially by the way, the garbage is a lot of high adventure drawings really badly. Like stick figures with swords and like a ship and a beach and treasure and then it just deteriorates into lines.

LYDIA

Cel looks genuinely sad.

ALEX

There is nothing more by the way to give you for that. I have been talking for 15 minutes.

BRYN

That was amazing. I loved every second of it.

ALEX

I don't have any more for you.

LYDIA

That was very, very good info dump.

ALEX

I've taken like 250 to 300 pages and given it to you in about 15 minutes.

LYDIA

That was excellent.

BEN

Solid exposition. Well done Alex.

LYDIA

Yes well done.

HELEN

Who'd like to clap him.

(clapping)

ALEX

I'm going to do something I don't often say which is...

LYDIA

A big sip of water.

ALEX

On the actual recording!

BEN

Hydrate oneself.

LYDIA

What are you going to say to make us spit it out?

HELEN

Ooh that was close!

BEN

Right over his laptop!

ALEX

Tempting, very tempting. Info dump complete. You would like to know the holy symbol

BEN

Yeah I'm looking for the holy symbol, being very careful with the glebe and stuff.

ALEX

That's fine. Hephaestus specifically

(gasping)

BEN

Piss!

(laughing)

BRYN

We need to search that person's belongings. Where are their belongings?

BEN

Yeah so I like hook the holy symbol, is it a little hammer? I'm assuming it's a little hammer.

ALEX

It's a hammer and chisel combo. Think like, forgive the reference, think like Soviet Russia. It's not a sickle, it's a chisel.

BEN

Yeah so I pick it up with my **slave** and hang it. Right Cleric of Hephaestus.

BRYN

Oh but Hephaestus...

LYDIA

Why does...

BRYN

Grizzop he...

BEN

Who?

BRYN

One of our members of our team

BEN

Oh sorry yeah you mentioned him.

BRYN

He went...he told us when he got to Rome that he'd gone to a cleric of Hephaestus and asked the cleric to build something for him.

HELEN

Yes

BEN

What? What? What did he want to build?

BRYN

A kill switch.

HELEN

Yes

BEN

For what?

BRYN

For the Simulacrum. The robots.

BEN

Right, ok.

LYDIA

So sorry, is the Simulacrum the robots or are the veins the Simulacrum...are the veins the robots?

BRYN

I still don't understand the connection but Wilde and Curie both seemed very sure that the veins were somehow connected to the robots. Now we found warehouses full of these robots in Damascus but we blew them all up and we destroyed the factory that was creating them. They were being run by people who wanted to kill everyone and take over the world as far as we could tell.

ALEX

For a change!

BRYN

But both Curie and Wilde seemed to think there was some connection. I still haven't worked out why they think that or what the connection is but the kill switch is potentially important and they said that the Hephaestus cleric...they found him or someone close to him but they denied all knowledge of it and I don't know what...there was some sort of breakdown of communication. Grizzop wasn't able to tell us everything that happened to him. He just summarise the story.

BEN

Well yeah Wilde mentioned it. Yeah before we hooked up he was looking for...

LYDIA

Oh!

BEN

No, not like that. He was looking for, as you say, the Hephaestus lot and they refused. Were they already infected? Is this even related?

LYDIA

Or maybe, is it possible that they actually were not infected, they were continuing their own investigations and they just didn't trust you.

BEN

I don't know. Wilde dealt with it. I didn't.

ALEX

Things that Wilde would've said is pretty much everything you've said beyond, he genuinely believed that Grizzop did commission them to make a thing. He has a pet theory which is that the Hephaestus lot just disappeared it. As for why, who could say. It could have been a whim of the person that built the thing for him.

BEN

Yeah, yeah of course or the oath that Grizzop...and as we all know...

ALEX

Yeah absolutely.

BEN

Right so, but then so Shoin isn't...Shoin is almost like a sideshow for this.

BRYN

But he thinks he might've found a way to stop the spread of the infection but only to himself and did he transmit to the network. That wasn't clear. And what is the network? He said he was staying in touch with these squid bodies but I couldn't tell how he was staying in touch with them.

LYDIA

He could've perhaps uploaded the meaning...the cure or the stop thing to one of the squids as a distributor network to make sure that it was not destroyed and so it could be floating around in these squids.

BRYN

So we might need to...

ALEX

Ah here's a better translation for you. Kraken. The word is Kraken not squids.

LYDIA

Krakens. Krakens sorry. Squids are the little ones. The Krakens, they're the big ones.

BRYN

Sure, sure.

BEN

But what does it have to do with the weather?

BRYN

So we have to capture a Kraken.

ALEX

I am going to give you some knowledge via knowledge profession sailor. Like just legends of the thing. Krakens, one, pretty sure they're all dead. Two...

BEN

Wrong but yeah.

ALEX

Two, the myths go as follows. Number one, can control the weather.

BEN

Oh! Oh ok.

ALEX

You ruled this out early in your investigations. Krakens there tends to be one. The reason being extremely intelligent creatures, extremely malicious creatures and they can be communicated with, bargained with and otherwise talked with. It's widely believed that even if there were Krakens, they were killed off by time if nothing else. Like they...

HELEN

Or dragons.

ALEX

There are a couple of accounts that are very, very early of like people who claim to have seen Krakens fighting each other. It doesn't really amount to much.

HELEN

Kraken civil war.

BEN

Right so, hang on a minute...

ALEX

But we're talking at least pre Rome, at least.

BEN

Right. So Shoin found a Kraken corpse and is now building his own Krakens himself as Krakens. They control the weather. What?! So this is just Shoin's ego.

BRYN

I mean so Shoin was having a pretty destructive effect on the world as a whole himself but he was still on a different side than the infection.

BEN

Well unfortunately the Krakens are still out there. Still going. And Shoin is mad now.

LYDIA

It could very well be that all of those krakens are now converging on this place to destroy us.

HELEN

I wasn't thinking about that.

LYDIA

Seeing as we...

HELEN

Quite deliberately.

BEN

We need to go downstairs and see if there's anything else and then we need to take Shoin and see if we can hook him up and get anything out of him, like the solution but it might be somewhere else.

LYDIA

I would very much advise against plugging him in to anything that we find that he designed because it probably has a backup communication.

BEN

Yes

BRYN

Zolf we need to sleep.

BEN

No we need to go...we can sleep when this is done.

BRYN

Zolf we're useless. We've been on the go for over 24 hours. We have climbed up and down stairs and ladders for hours.

BEN

We cannot spend eight hours in this place.

BRYN

Not in this room but we need to find somewhere.

BEN

Let's just go down the stairs. We can run away if we need to but we can't stop now.

HELEN

How are we going to run away?

BRYN

We are useless at this point Zolf. I am...I'm going to be asleep on my feet in an hour or two. We haven't eaten. We haven't rested. We are...whatever is down there we need to be in peak condition and we cannot face whatever comes next without resting first.

HELEN

I'm with him. I'm out of healing and I'm so tired.

BEN

We can't wait! If we wait, we give them eight hours. If Cel is right we have kraken conversion on here. There was not one far away. We have limited time before this base is potentially destroyed along with us

LYDIA

I actually quite like the idea of both. Like both. So we go downstairs, there's probably maybe caves. I would hope that there are some places that maybe sealed off and then we can have a rest. Because I...I have run out of weapons and at the moment if a kraken turned up, I would be less than useless.

BEN

Skraak. Does Skraak know if there's a way out via the kobold tunnels.

HELEN

I can't fit.

BEN

We don't know how big they are! They might make them big.

BRYN

Skraak says he's never been down here but I can ask. Skraak?

ALEX

Oh Skraak's not in the room.

BRYN

Skraak? Skraak? Skraak?

BEN

Right that solves that conversation. Down we go. And I start walking down.

LYDIA

Cel gives a very sympathetic look to Azu.

HELEN

Azu trudges after Zolf.

BRYN

Is it dark down there?

ALEX

The iris mechanism in the middle of the table opened and a platform came up.
You cannot climb down...

BRYN

You've got stairs created.

ALEX

Stairs got created on either side leading up on top of the table.

BRYN

Oh!

ALEX

You can only head down through a lift. There was also the chute that the chair was...

BEN

Is the platform the lift?

ALEX

Yes.

BEN

Ok, ok, well I...

ALEX

Basically you know that unless he's turned himself into goo, there's a metal grill, he hasn't gone down that way. He could've gone down the chair chute.

BRYN

Skraak? Skraak? Skraak?

ALEX

The door that you haven't entered, opens. Skraak then pokes his head out from the entrance way. The galley way that you initially came up in.

BRYN

Oh you are you ok? I didn't know where you'd...

ALEX

Door. Fixed it! Too much door.

BRYN

You got it open.

ALEX

Yep

BRYN

Good work but just...just so you know, it'd be useful to let me know what you're doing if you're going to disappear so we don't know where you are...

BEN

Ask about the tunnels.

BRYN

...we're a team, we're going to stick together. We think there are some ancient tunnels below the ground that are down there. We think they might've belonged to the kobolds once. Have you ever heard about kobold caves under here?

ALEX

Skraak kind of...his face screws up. He's like yeah. It looks maybe not painful but it's like he's trying to fit into a space that's too small for him.

BRYN

Yeah. Skraak it's ok.

ALEX

Yeah, yeah.

BRYN

You think you might have. Ok don't force anything. It's going...I think it might start coming back to you but we'll have to see.

BEN

We need to go.

BRYN

We're going to go down there. You should come with us.

ALEX

Yeah

BRYN

Ok we're going to stick together.

ALEX

Skraak just takes a surprising flying leap from the high balcony and just flips and then lands fairly well. Cobbles they're bouncy. Mostly made of rubber.

(laughing)

HELEN

Is that canon?

ALEX

Canon, they're mostly made of rubber and enthusiasm. Skraak.

BRYN

We're going to go down now are you going to stick with us?

ALEX

Skraak.

BRYN

Yeah ok.

ALEX

Skraak preps spear ready to sort of activate the lift and just stares.

LYDIA

Cel's wings, by the way, are still pretty massive. I don't think mechanically they're in the way but they're like...they're awkwardly poking you every now and again.

ALEX

You can say that you don't think that mechanically they're in the way but mechanically they're in the way.

LYDIA

Yeah, yeah like in a charisma -1 kind of sense.

ALEX

Yeah there you go.

LYDIA

They're in the way.

BEN

Get on the lift.

ALEX

Yep.

HELEN

Yeah I follow

BRYN

Yep get on the lift.

ALEX

Fair enough. Skraak takes a moment. Looks to everyone. Everyone ready.

BEN

Double thumbs up.

HELEN

Is that what he says?

ALEX

Mer, is what he says. At which point Skraak just goes [grumbling noise] jabs it in a little bit, pulls his spear out, as the lift starts descending he scampers up and leaps onto the platform and stands there. Too much lift. Then it starts to descend and the iris mechanism closes overhead. I'll take a break there I think.

And coming back in. So as you're descending lights turn on which is good. The lift appears to be fixed at three points and is just...

LYDIA

Three rails that are going down.

ALEX

Yeah, yeah, yeah, think three rails so it's equal distance...equilateral triangle, that's the word. So it's heading down and lights come on at the level that you're at and then as it lowers, the next layer of lights come on and the last layer turn so you're in a thing. Skraak's just there, kind of, [humming].

LYDIA

The claws at the top of the bat wings tapping out a rhythm.

BEN

Zolf is silent.

ALEX

Stands a little closer to Zolf. [humming]

BRYN

Hamid is counter harmonising. Bryn can't do that but Hamid can and he does.

ALEX

Naturally, naturally. The lift journey continues.

LYDIA

Important question, how much time has passed because am I still a giant bat thing?

ALEX

How long does giant bat thing last?

LYDIA

80 minutes.

ALEX

That long.

LYDIA

Ok yeah. We got a lot...

BRYN

We spent quite a lot of time searching and reading and stuff.

ALEX

Yeah there you go. As you descend...

LYDIA

Reading out that diary...Cel did all the voices.

HELEN

Ah ha ha ha!

ALEX

Sorry and then Shoin was like rah, rah, rah, rah and the kraken was like blah, blah, blah. Love it! So as you're descending you slowly start to occupy less space.

LYDIA

And yet somehow still awkwardly. Actually no less awkwardly because my charisma goes from...I was on charisma -2, now I'm on charisma -1.

HELEN

Aw.

BRYN

You've become less awkward.

LYDIA

You all feel less awkward now.

ALEX

See the mechanics, they work. The excessive mechanics work. As we all continue down actually you are approaching a light change towards the bottom of the lift so you can see that you're about to enter a larger room. The lift continues to descend at a steady rate and then it descends and you enter into a much, much larger space. To be clear the lift hasn't just plummeted. The three points of contact are still extending in what appears to be a huge, natural cavern. So bear with me as I describe all of it and then I'll add detail. It appears to be a massive, enormous cavern beyond really the realms that you're able to see even with dark vision and so on. So we're talking hundreds of feet. It has a red glow to it looking down a couple of hundred feet. You just get this free there, there appears to be some lava. Something appears to be blocking it. It appears to be in a pipe.

BRYN

Slightly see through if there's red light coming out.

ALEX

Yeah so it looks like there appear to be inspection hatches or something where lots of red light are coming out.

BRYN

Does that mean it's quite warm in here?

ALEX

Yes so it's very, very warm. There's a lot of steam coming through. Anyone know what hot brine smells like?

LYDIA

Yeah like in Iceland where you're having...

ALEX

Hot spring, that's the word. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it has that kind of tang to it.

LYDIA

Does it have a sulphur smell?

LYDIA

We're underground.

ALEX

Maybe a little bit. Yeah, maybe a little bit.

LYDIA

So it's...

HELEN

Increasingly hellish.

BRYN

Oh my god we're in a secret volcano base underneath a secret seafloor base.
How many layers of supervillain...

ALEX

You kept complaining about pulpy so you're now in a secret volcano base at the bottom of the ocean that's also gothic, that's also a giant asylum vibe, that's also an island on the sea...

BRYN

Too many tropes.

ALEX

What do you want?

LYDIA

From you Bryn! From you!

ALEX

So as you continue descending there's the occasional like waft of steam that comes across that has that tang to it. No one's making **falsation** or suffocating or anything. It's just a flavour thing. But it is slightly obscuring...

BRYN

Is it a bit uncomfortable?

ALEX

Yeah it's not nice. That's the best way to describe it.

BRYN

It seems like it might get quite hot down here. I've got endure elements I could cast it twice. I don't know if anyone else has anything else left?

HELEN

Let's not waste...

LYDIA

I can also do that. You would be surprised how often extreme temperatures come up in my line of work.

(laughing)

BEN

Use it when we know we need it. Don't use it now.

HELEN

Oh Cel you're back.

LYDIA

Ah yes. Slightly less kind with the teeth and the claws and the...

HELEN

Nice to see you.

ALEX

So as you continue descending you start seeing that there are metal walkways crisscrossing this space which is massive by the way. Like massive.

BRYN

Do the walkways have rails? How many respect to health and safety does this supervillain have?

ALEX

The walkways do have rails and they appear to have a handrail at a lower height and a higher height.

BRYN

Ah! Pretty good.

ALEX

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Cel can you give me a knowledge geography please?

LYDIA

22

ALEX

This cavern shouldn't be here. This is wrong! This is not the way the world works out. You can't have a cavern this big at the bottom of the ocean 'cos physics.

LYDIA

So this like...this place shouldn't...it shouldn't be. Like you shouldn't...think about the weight of the all the water that's above here and how it might drop through and how this is a cavern and there's lava and like, basically physics. All of that, this and geography too. Consider nature as well. Maybe dungeoneering...

(laughing)

Which is something that I state you shouldn't put time into learning about because it comes up less than you'd think. You know all those things together, this place...this is wrong.

BRYN

How so?

LYDIA

Like naturally this wouldn't be...it's going to need to be propped up with magic or something?

HELEN

That seems reasonable.

BRYN

It might be reinforced, there's clearly construction down here. If they built the walkways maybe they reinforced the walls.

BEN

Most importantly it's here.

HELEN

Yes

BEN

It's not going to imminently collapse on us. It's here.

LYDIA

Well the fact that it shouldn't be here does sort of...it is valuable to know because maybe if we turned things off maybe it would collapse on us.

BRYN

That's a good point yes.

ALEX

Everyone give me a sense motive please.

BRYN

17

HELEN

13

LYDIA

12

BEN

22

ALEX

22. Zolf. Oh Azu, you're slipping.

HELEN

I am. I'm tired.

ALEX

Zolf you notice that Skraak's in a bad way. You realise that he hasn't really been piping up or anything and looking at him, ears are down, tails droopy, shoulders down. Do you know the sad dog vibe where they ate your dinner and it's not that they're worried that they're going to get shouted at but they know they did wrong. Like in their bones they're not a good dog.

HELEN

Oh no!

LYDIA

Always a good dog!

ALEX

Apparently Skraak does not think Skraak is a good dog. Let's put it that way. Skraak is imploding in on himself.

BEN

Hamid –

BRYN

What?

BEN

What's wrong with Skraak?

BRYN

Oh Skraak? Skraak are you ok?

ALEX

Nothing from Skraak except a 1000 yard stare.

BRYN

Skraak what's wrong? Skraak it's ok you can talk to us. What's wrong?

ALEX

[grumbling noise]

BRYN

Have you been here before? Are memories coming back?

ALEX

It's bad

BRYN

What's bad about it Skraak?

ALEX

Skraak just kind of, we should go up. We should go back up. Back up, it's bad.

BRYN

We've got to know what's down here.

ALEX

It's bad.

BRYN

Skraak are you ok?

BEN

What's wrong?

BRYN

He's not very clear. He just seems to be afraid. He seems to think this place is bad.

BEN

That's too vague. What's...

BRYN

I know

BEN

Well make him tell you.

BRYN

Skraak, it's ok, we're going to protect you. But you have to tell us what's here.

ALEX

It's bad. Skraak is now on his haunches. His spear is now lay down on the lift and she's just getting smaller...in fact he is coiling in on himself like a cat that's ill or...

HELEN

Oh god.

ALEX

Or a snake that's trying to occupy the minimum amount of space.

HELEN

Can I pick him up?

ALEX

Yes

HELEN

I would like to pick up the small sad kobold and do a little patty back.

ALEX

As you do so you feel his tiny little heart, a pitter patter fluttering, incredibly quickly.

HELEN

I think he's panicking.

BRYN

Yeah he just seems really afraid.

ALEX

He's gone by the way.

BRYN

He's not able to articulate why.

BEN

Right keep your axe arm free, ready.

HELEN

I only need one hand for that.

ALEX

I'd say Skraak basically ends up coiling around your neck. Does the sort of head...

HELEN

A Skraak scarf.

ALEX

Yes! There's a Skraak

(laughing)

ALEX

Yes.

LYDIA

I wonder if there's a knitting pattern for something like that.

BRYN

One of our friends has already crocheted a little Skraak. One of our fans. Did I say friends? Fans/friends same thing.

ALEX

I have to warn you that the Scraf with his head nuzzled into your armpit to hide his head more, technically would be occupying the neck slot but I'm going to allow it.

HELEN

Thank you. Reward my compassion Alex.

ALEX

I'll do it this time.

BRYN

I guess I pick up his spear for him.

ALEX

Go for it.

BRYN

And put it in my bag of holding.

ALEX

The lift arrives...by which I mean...

BRYN

Do we have the brain orb? Who's carrying the brain orb? What are we doing with the brain orb?

LYDIA

No it's too big.

BEN

How big is it?

ALEX

I'm happy to rep con you the way. It is carriable but it is like the size of a person's torso.

BEN

If we were looking for a way out someone will have had to bring it.

ALEX

I'm fine for you to just bag of holding it if you want.

LYDIA

Yay! Will it fit?

ALEX

Bag of holding...

BEN

Can't put people in there.

ALEX

People...

BEN

Yes it's an intelligent...

ALEX

Hmm

BEN

It's an intelligence.

LYDIA

Well no...

ALEX

You can put a people in a thing, it's just that they only get a limited amount of air.

BEN

Oh is it air.

ALEX

So there's no air in there.

BEN

Oh fine then whack it in.

ALEX

So they just get to go [deep breath]

LYDIA

You put the sword in.

BRYN

If it fits inside the aperture

ALEX

Hold on a minute, consulting the judges. Narrative expediency, fit inside a bag of holding.

(laughing)

LYDIA

Like maybe you look around and Cel has somehow constructed a stretchy thing from the bag of holding.

ALEX

So if you apply enough force to a brain orb it just fits. Who knew.

LYDIA

Holding it and kicking...

ALEX

Mechanically you have forced the orb into a bag of holding that should not have been big enough to allow it in.

LYDIA

It's not a pretty sight.

BRYN

The next time you retrieve something from that bag of holding it's covered in blue veins so it's not even an object with a circulatory system. What happened to it?

LYDIA

That's really worrying.

ALEX

That's not canon. What is canon is that you reach your destination which is a large metal platform suspended to all intents and purposes in the middle of the cavern. There are three walkways leading off to it towards the edges of the room which are well beyond the range of your vision.

BRYN

There's enough light to just sort of see by for those of without dark vision.

ALEX

Yeah there is some light. There is an ambient glow of doom. So as it stands you are now suspended in the middle of this cavern. Maybe not the exact middle but you know what I mean, like laterally...

BRYN

And there's walkways heading...

ALEX

And there are three walkways, each equilateral triangle style leading away into different walls of the cavern.

BRYN

Pick one and start walking.

HELEN

Alright

ALEX

Yeah. So you all start walking and, yeah, the steam is still sort of obscuring vision a little bit. Can everyone give me a perception roll please

BEN

Natural 1

HELEN

Oh dear

BRYN

Ooh 30.

ALEX

It's alright for some. I'd say unlucky for some but 30 is very rarely an unlucky number in Pathfinder.

HELEN

17

LYDIA

18

ALEX

Hamid then you get it first. You know that thing when you are looking at stars and you're looking at the stars and you feel like you can see more stars at the edge of your vision but then you look there and then they're not there but it's because you, you know...edge of eyes sense more light

BRYN

Yeah eyes are weird.

ALEX

But you know what I mean, the stars are there but they're kind of gone when you look. You're getting that looking out towards the wall of the cavern. It feels like that just immediately sense.

BRYN

Like points of light.

ALEX

There are points of light. There are points of light kind of dotted around the cavern. They appear to be green not white.

BRYN

A giant gemstone. A giant geode.

LYDIA

Well no, no, no, ok. I mean I can roll...I've got enough points in knowledge geography that unless I roll a natural 1.

ALEX

I am introducing the mechanic of passive geography. Your passive geography goes...

LYDIA

Shall I roll to know?

ALEX

No, no, it's a passive...

LYDIA

Passive geography

ALEX

You just know.

LYDIA

No. Just no. Just...

BRYN

I don't think Hamid even says that in character probably. Like he doesn't think there's anything worth remarking on here. It's ever so slightly weird but this cavern is weird so...

LYDIA

Fair enough.

ALEX

I mean, let's put it this way you were already violating the rules of physics, maybe it is an enormous geode. There we go...I assume...do you even let people know? Do we keep walking?

BRYN

I honestly don't think Hamid finds that weird enough to remark upon. Like as far as he knows it's normal for a volcanic cavern underneath the sea. I mean frames of reference and stuff right.

BEN

So I think we continue on.

ALEX

Fair enough. So you press along the...I was going to say corridor, the walkway and as you do the points of light resolve themselves into actually being pairs of points of light.

LYDIA

Oh no.

ALEX

Stretching up the walls all the way out of your range of vision up, down, to the left, to the right, on all sides of the cavern that you can see.

LYDIA

Ok let's hold off exactly how horrified we should be until we learn if they have faces.

(groaning)

BRYN

Oh! Lydia!

HELEN

That's worse!

LYDIA

I was just saying. We've seen things split before.

ALEX

Maybe it's Acme style, you know when they animate a dark room and the light turns on and it's just the eyes going...

LYDIA

Shoin could've just put a glowstick in a toilet roll tube

(laughing)

ALEX

It's all smoke and mirrors! Press on/stop?

BRYN

Yeah we carry on.

ALEX

Ok fair enough. I am basically going to say you continue pressing on and then it resolves for all of you for the sake of my ease, all at the same time which is the final briny steam passes away and you see on the walls, stretching up, down, left and right prison cells. So like jail cells with metal bars across the front and within each of them is a kobold with glowing green eyes.

LYDIA

Oh no. No, that's worse. That's worse.

HELEN

Azu makes sure that Skraak can't see.

ALEX

Yeah Skraak's buried his face.

BRYN

Like a battery farm.

ALEX

That's exactly what we're going for. The cages are not large enough for a kobold to do more than sit.

EVERYONE

Ahhhhh.

LYDIA

Oh Alex no! I don't even respect your craft anymore.

ALEX

It's not...

HELEN

Well we haven't respected his craft for a long time.

ALEX

It is not nice. And they stacked on top of one another. Up, down, left, right as far as you can see circling the cavern...

BRYN

Why are their eyes glowing?

LYDIA

Is it the same green as the...

ALEX

Oh yes.

LYDIA

So I would hazard the guess which the same fluid which turned on the big thing up there, these are somehow connected. I don't know how. This is not something that I have studied. I would really make that clear but if there's a catalysing agent that's able to animate things up there, it may be able to animate control drug.

BRYN

What did he do to them?

HELEN

Are they all mind controlled?

BEN

Regardless of what's happened, it's going to be bad.

ALEX

Everyone give me a perception check please.

HELEN

Oh god. 13

BEN

Natural 20.

BRYN

23

ALEX

You are all over the map Zolf, you've from 1 to 20 and back again. I don't like your bell curves, they seem wrong to me.

LYDIA

27

ALEX

I'm going to go with Zolf then. Zolf you're the first to notice that around the cavern, you notice that there are a few kobolds having a wander. To be clear they don't seem to have green eyes the way that the ones in the cells do but they are just sort of padding along. There's a couple fairly nearby doing some basic maintenance on a cell...

LYDIA

A what?

ALEX

...like there's a couple carrying stuff on the far side.

(laughing)

A prison box.

(laughing)

Which is significantly less dramatic as a word. But yeah they are...they are sort of padding along apparently unconcerned. No one seems to have noticed you or anything.

BEN

There's maintenance staff.

BRYN

Oh

BEN

Talk to them.

HELEN

We should...yeah.

BRYN

Ok

BEN

Hamid, go.

LYDIA

Can you...with your voice and your claw thing.

BRYN

Yeah I guess I'll speak to them to find out what's going on. What about the ones in the cells? Are we going to let them out? We can't if they're...their eyes...

ALEX

They are all perfectly still. They are...you can even see from here they are breathing but they're all just staring dead ahead.

HELEN

Can we get close to them? Are we able to...

ALEX

So just to describe it a little bit more, the walkway goes up to a lit walkway that is on a row of these...I've got to call them cells. It's...

LYDIA

It's fine, I'll allow it.

ALEX

They are stacked three high with a ladder beside so you can get to the cells that are stacked and then there is another walkway after three cells up and

then another walkway and the same down below. It's matrix. They're in the matrix. It's the matrix, ok. At least the goopy bit.

HELEN

Maybe we should...

BRYN

We'll talk to the...I guess I talk to the maintenance ones first and try and find out what's going on with the ones in the cells.

LYDIA

Just be gentle with them. I don't think we should hurt them anymore.

BRYN

If we can avoid it.

BEN

While they're deliberating, I'm going to go see if the maintenance staff, if there's something they're going or from so I'm going to try and find a way out.

ALEX

Like a side door to the main cavern.

BEN

Yeah

ALEX

Sure, sure. I am going to separate you out but I'm going to assume you don't go out of eyesight or at least close enough because otherwise...

BEN

I can hear them, I'll go.

ALEX

Ok cool.

BRYN

Yeah I guess I go up to two of the maintenance kobolds. Hi.

ALEX

They stop and turn to you. They are dull. I don't know how else to put it. Have you ever been around...

LYDIA

Like the ones upstairs or...

ALEX

No worse. Way worse. So if the ones upstairs were like, you know, a little bit off these are bordering on a catatonic state and they are blank faced and they just look at you. One of them is holding a spanner, the other one is holding a

screwdriver and they just stand looking at you. It's like they're waiting for orders.

HELEN

Aw

BRYN

I don't think they're ok. What are your orders?

ALEX

They just kind of point to different bits of the cavern.

BRYN

Where do you go to get orders?

ALEX

They both kind of look at one another for a moment and then they just both look up.

BRYN

Where do you sleep?

ALEX

They kind of take a while, then point to just different points in the cavern again.

LYDIA

There must be...those must be safe places right. There must be places that maybe we can rest or that we can take some of them and I'm thinking if we keep them away from whatever is keeping them doped up...

BRYN

Yeah they must be getting new doses right.

LYDIA

With Skraak it seems like he's changed a lot over the course of just a couple of hours and I know I estimated before that it might take...

BRYN

You said 24 I think

LYDIA

Like a while but maybe...maybe, you know...

BRYN

He might've been further from his most recent dose.

LYDIA

Yeah, yeah, yeah so we just need to keep them safe.

BRYN

We can stop them being dosed. Maybe they'll start to recover too.

HELEN

Let's hope so. Should we take one or...

LYDIA

Cel is going to grapple one and tie their hands up.

ALEX

Grapple's a strong word for gently lead into a rope.

LYDIA

Wrap it around them and then pick them up.

ALEX

They don't really seem to understand what you're doing but they're happy to...they would help if they could understand what you were trying to do.

BRYN

I'm going to talk to the other one and be like you should follow us and see if they'll take orders from me.

ALEX

Kind of looks at your blankly.

BRYN

I'm not sure that's gonna...

LYDIA

Cel looks at the one they're holding and is like you're going to be ok now.
You're going to be ok.

BRYN

I pop my claws and say you should follow me.

ALEX

You get nothing

BRYN

And I take them away again because I only get a limited number of rounds per day.

ALEX

They've got eyes like saucers but all they do it look at faces. Zolf as you temporarily...yeah you find a pressure door, same as the ones they have up in the above place.

BRYN

You mean the submarine style.

ALEX

Yes the ring turn-y door style and it leads past the cells, as in think if the cells are lining the cavern wall, it just seems to leap past them.

BEN

I've got a way out over here.

HELEN

Oh.

BRYN

Yeah I guess we...

HELEN

Alright.

ALEX

The one you ordered follows.

LYDIA

Ooh!

BRYN

Maybe it did work then

HELEN

We're collecting kobolds.

BRYN

Apparently so.

HELEN

Better than having...

BRYN

Let all of them but it doesn't seem safe.

ALEX

None of the ones in the cells have reacted to you in any way. They're not even staring at you as you go past. They're just staring out into the cavern.

BRYN

Their eyes are really freaking me out.

ALEX

There appears to be some mechanisms within there for basic food and drink. Think like water bottles.

LYDIA

There's a pipe in and out.

ALEX

Feed tray. Yeah there's an in pipe and an out pipe and there's a bottom pipe, as in like a draining pipe if you must know.

LYDIA

Oh Alex! This is dark.

ALEX

It's horrible.

BRYN

This is so distressing.

ALEX

This is getting all of the content warning.

HELEN

Yes! Good it needs them.

BRYN

Good yeah.

HELEN

So Azu says maybe we can come back for them but right now...

BRYN

Yeah we follow Zolf I guess.

HELEN

Yeah

ALEX

Cool. Do you open the door?

BEN

Yeah

ALEX

Ok. Opening the door, on the far side you can see there is a corridor of worked stone, so it looks like it was maybe a natural one that has then been worked on and chipped out and so on. Medium sized so yeah...

LYDIA

So Azu can fit.

ALEX

Yeah Azu can fit in. Let's put it this way...

HELEN

Good to know.

ALEX

...it looks like it may not once have, this is for Zolf for obvious reasons, it looks like it was once a small one that someone has worked to be comfortable for medium. Not even just like big enough. Like comfortable for.

BEN

Ok

LYDIA

That's a nice change.

ALEX

You head down the corridor.

BEN

Yeah

ALEX

Well then why don't we head down the corridor.

LYDIA

Wait, wait, wait. Close the door behind us.

BRYN

Oooh!

LYDIA

I breathe in, I breathe out. I close the door behind us.

BRYN

We didn't check for traps. We're probably all dead when we opened the door. He's just not told us yet.

ALEX

Why don't we close the door on the nightmare cavern and end the episode there.

BRYN

Oh my god and next week's 150!

ALEX

A horrible, horrible episode!

BRYN

Don't trust anything!

ALEX

Bleak, dark and horrible.

HELEN

This is your fault!

ALEX

Oh yeah I made this one.

BRYN

Your craft is impressive but I don't think I can respect it.

HELEN

No, never.

ALEX

Please don't! It's horrific. But we'll find out what happens next week at least.

EVERYONE

Bye!

[Show Theme - Outro]

ALEX

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