

Episode 25

Narrator: Like much of the rest of the ship, the crew bunks are almost deliberately unpleasant. The music is continuous and cheesy, there's a weird odor, the walls are liver colored, and the beds are short, lumpy and ill-tempered. Leet wanted to do something to make everyone's bunk feel like home. Using what tools he could find aboard the 9, he crafted everyone a metal sign saying "welcome" – spelled w-e-l-l-k-o-m-e, which manages to be slightly wrong in both English and German – and hung them over everyone's beds. Which is very sweet, except when you're uncontrollably shooting lasers out of various body parts and the blasts keep pinging off the metal. After just under 8 minutes of both shooting and ducking laser bursts, Colin emerges from his bunk, confused, exhausted, and singed.

Colin: What the bloody hell was that?

Jessie: You're alive? How the hell are you alive?

Colin: I'm sure I shouldn't be. I was hit any number of times. I'm pretty sure there were holes straight through me, but they just ... closed up again.

Jessie: But there's no holes in your suit.

Colin: Yes, those appear to have closed up as well. How is that possible? I know there was a hole straight through here. I saw sunlight.

Olivia: Um, ew, but we'll discuss that in a moment. For now, can the two of you get to the bridge?

Jessie: Can you walk?

Colin: Yes. In fact, I'm fairly sure I can fly. But let's not test that here.

Jessie: You didn't even spill your martini.... What the hell is going on here?

Olivia: Oh, gourd almighty. Shut up and follow the doors!

[sounds of the bridge]

Olivia: They're on their way.

Madeline: What damage did he do?

Olivia: A lot less than I'd reckoned, to be honest. Turns out, those bunks are insulated to the hilt, which is odd. It's like G2 were concerned their crews would be building campfires or something. Which is also odd, since there's an entire hold filled with graham crackers, chocolate, and marshmallows. And pointed sticks.

Leet: Where is that?

Olivia: Never you mind. Not having you hyped up on sugar a second time.

vHZ: Vat is taking zem so long?

Olivia: I'm taking them the long way round. Colin's still a tiny bit radioactive. Thought I'd let that burn off a bit before exposing you lot to him.

Madeline: What? What about Jessie?

Olivia: Oh, don't worry about her, she's Scottish.

Madeline: What- What does that even mean?

[bridge door, footsteps]

Colin: Dr von... Happenstance, what the hell is going on?

vHZ: Zo many zuperpowers, and yet remembering my name is not von of dem.

Colin: Believe me, I would happily trade firing deadly laser beams out my ... firing deadly laser beams for better name retention. What else have you done to me?

Leet: Maybe don't get angry again?

Olivia: Good point, dearest. Colin, keep a lid on it, mate. Or it's the fwip, got it?

Colin: Well, that'll certainly help me stay calm.

Madeline: What exactly is going on with you? Are you even a real person?

Colin: Of course I'm a real person! Or at least I was I'm not even sure anymore.... You know, I came on this journey to leave my problems behind me.

Leet: Did it work?

[beat]

Leet: [very quietly] Well, did it?

Madeline: So what happened?

Colin: The Albatros gave me an olive.

[beat]

Madeline: I'm guessing there's more to this story?

vHZ: Ze olif vas von of mine.

[beat]

Madeline: Expecting a paragraph, getting phrases. Can we pick this up a bit?

vHZ: It vas von of my experiments from the G2 innovazions lab. Loaded up vis rather a lot of zuper powers, you zee. I was not expecting anyone to actually eat zis, it vas more of a ... transportation device.

Jessie: Super powers? Like firing lasers and healing really fast?

vHZ: Among ozer tings, yes.

Olivia: Come on, Doc, spill it. What else?

vHZ: Vell, I know he can smell really gut.

Leet: Really? He hasn't showered in, like, a week, and it's been a pretty stressful week.

vHZ: Not what I am meaning, my boy. His hearing is much improved.

Leet: Really? Cause I've been asking him for days to clean his mess out of the microwave, and he still hasn't done it.

vHZ: I said his *hearing* is improved. Zere's nuthink I can do about his listening.

Colin: You realize I'm right here, right?

Madeline: We know his sight is changed. He can see in the dark.

Jessie: And the hallway signs. He can see those as well.

vHZ: Ahhhhh, zo you can zee the hallway signs. I vas vondering about zat.

Colin: I'm not sure they're entirely accurate, but yes, I can see them. They're everywhere.

Jessie: Didn't you just tell me you could fly?

Leet: FLY??? That's the coolest thing ever! Do it! Do it!

vHZ: Ah, no, I don't zink zo. Levitate, maybe.

Colin: I think I'm pretty strong. And fast. I carried Dr. von Ha'Penny there to the bridge without breaking a sweat.

Madeline: How strong are you? Could you... lift Leet, for example?

Colin: I don't know. Let's see.

Olivia: Carefully.

Colin: Don't worry, I'll lift from the knees.

Olivia: Not you I'm worried about.

Jessie: Go on! Can you lift him, then?

[grunting]

Colin: Apparently not.

Leet: I'm pretty dense.

Jessie: You know, when people tell you that, they don't mean- Never mind.

Madeline: And there's the lasers — anything else we should know about before it shows up and nearly kills someone?

Colin: I ... don't know. Doctor?

vHZ: Honestly, zere is already more happenink zen I planned. Ze olif is integrating vis Colin's body chemistry in vays I did not foresee. Zis vill take a bit of studying.

Jessie: Is it permanent?

vHZ: Ach, zis is ze hundred dollar qvestion, is it not? We are now in ze wait-and-zee part of Colin's evolution.

Madeline: Colin, you're going to have to be completely honest with us. Any time a new ... symptom? Power? Whatever, shows up, you need to tell us.

Olivia: So I can decide whether or not to fwip you.

Colin: What?!

Madeline: OLIVIA. Look, I promise we won't throw you out an airlock. We just need to know what we're dealing with. Is there anything else?

Colin: Well, ... there is one more thing....

Jessie: What is it? You shoot fire from your fingertips?

Leet: You can stream music out your belly button?

Jessie: What? What sort of super power is that?

Leet: I dunno... like, for helping babies sleep on airplanes?

Jessie: That would be nice, actually.

vHZ: Oooo, friend Leet, I am writing zis down.

Olivia: Back to the matter at hand, I think?

vHZ: Yes, apologies. Zo, Colin, vat else have you discovered?

Colin: Well ... Uhhhh... when I ... hiccup, the ... lights dim.

Leet: Well, that's stupid.

Colin: But playing music from your navel is completely reasonable.

vHZ: Zat makes no zense at all. Can you show us zis hiccupping dimmer svitch zing?

Colin: Well, no. I'm not hiccupping, am I? It only happens with real hiccups.

Leet: BOO!

Colin: GAH! What the hell was that for?

Leet: I was trying to make you hiccup.

Colin: You scare the hiccups OUT of people, not INTO them, you plank!

Leet: Sorry.

Olivia: Yes, probably best we don't scare Colin just at the moment, all right?

Leet: Oh, yeah. [soothing voice] It's OK, little fella. You just take a couple of deep breaths, and exhale slowly....hopefully not fire, but if you do, it's OK, just point it that way.

Colin: Shut up. And stop banging me on the head while I still have a neck.

vHZ: I am zinking perhaps you could follow me to my laboratory, and ve can do some testink, my boy. Leet, perhaps you vould be villing to accompany us?

Leet: Ooooo! Can I help with the tests?

vHZ: Zertainly! You can stand between me and Mr Electric Martini man here.

Olivia: What if he goes all veiny and lasery again? There's a lot that could get destroyed in there. Or possibly come alive...

vHZ: Don't worry, Olifia, all ze experiments are put zafely away, and almost none of zem can open drawerz on zere own. As for ze lab, it is vell inzulated. What do you zay, good fellow; shall we learn more about your powerz?

Colin: Yes, all right. It won't hurt, will it?

[door, footsteps, fading]

vHZ: Don't worry, my boy. I am 100 percent certain I will be fine.

Colin: Oh, thank god. Wait-

Leet: Don't worry! I'll sing to you if it hurts.

Colin: You think causing me *more* pain will help?

Leet: See, now that's just rude.

[bridge]

Jessie: Are you all right with this?

Madeline: All right? I have a crew member who shoots lasers when he gets angry and has super powers we don't even understand yet. How could I possibly be all right?

Jessie: Hang on – “crew member”?

Madeline: OK, there are those quote marks again.

Jessie: Do you actually think Colin is a crew member?

Madeline: Well, yeah. He's our PR guy. Of all the things I just said about Colin, “crew member” is the bit that's bothering you?

Jessie: A crew member.... in a tuxedo?

Madeline: He was a last-minute fill-in for Matt the engineer.

Jessie: He's carrying a martini!

Madeline: He was probably recruited while he was at a party.

Jessie: I don't even know what to say right now.

Madeline: Well, that's a first. And a gift. Look, could you help me get control of my ship back? Also, we probably ought to check on Emily and ... the 778. Olivia? Can you open comms to Cal's room?

Olivia: Opening comms!

[sound of Cal's room, banging]

Head 1: The fun thing about radishes, you see, is they have a very long history. Radishes were used to pay laborers who built the pyramids, and in Mexico, the night before Christmas eve is the Noche de Rabanos or Night of the Radishes.

[click]

Olivia: Nope. Nope nope nope.

Jessie: Everything sounds – and I realize how ironic this word choice is – normal.

Madeline: Fine. We'll assume Cal's under control for the moment. Now let's see if we can say the same for the 9.

Narrator: As the Oz 9 continues on some unknown course through the inky blackness of space, guided by an unseen hand, one member of the crew is on a quest of her own. Only ... it's not really *her* quest.

Albatros: This is ridiculous. I cannot believe there isn't a map of these pods. He's here somewhere, but how am I supposed to find him?

LBF: We will find him. And ze little dog too. We have only begun to look. You must have the patience!

Albatros: Why do you keep searching for that dog? Even if you found it, it's too late. The shuttle would never make it all the way back to earth now.

LBF: Oh. Uhhhhh.... Really? I had not done the maths. Well, perhaps the Oz 9 must be happy with just one le Bichon Frise awake.

Albatros: It's cute you think we'd choose you over the dog.

LBF: I am aware I have been insulted, but I shall remember that you called me "cute."

Albatros: In air quotes, I assure you. What are you looking at?

LBF: There are some headphones here. I hear a little man talking. What are these for?

Albatros: Well, I don't know, do I? Hand them over.

Tour Guide: Pod Bay 78 — the Bottega Veneta wing — houses just over 1100 pods, most occupied by Instagram influencers and YouTube make-up-tutorial stars. Some notable pod occupants, or "podcupants" — and I just coined that expression, trademark pending — include pod 7758, Count Verquis a la Mondaise. Count Verquis was born Simon Sheering in Normal, Illinois...

LBF: What are you hearing?

Albatros: It's a guided tour. Of the pods.

Narrator: I'd just like to point out that Tour Guiding and Narrating are two entirely separate skill sets. The Narrator License has far more stringent requirements for completion, including successfully passing a comprehensive exam called "The Verbiage." Whereas just about anyone can throw up a shingle and call themselves a "Tour Guide." Any attempt to replace one with the other will be met with a cease and desist order from a representative of the Narrators and Voice-Over Professionals Guild. Thank you.

LBF: What? A tour guide? Why?

Albatros: That's an excellent question. They can't imagine the crew would need this information.

LBF: Let me listen!

Tour Guide: At the tender age of 14, Simon first donned a cape, planning to demonstrate a few sleight-of-hand tricks on You Tube, mostly for the amusement of friends. His skill at magic was far less interesting to viewers than his ability to create a really smokin' smoky eye, and he quickly rose to fame and fortune as a DIY make-up artist.

LBF: But this is nonsense! Who could possibly care about this?

Albatros: A really good smoky eye is a sort of go-to for a night out- Oh.

LBF: And with this informations about the make upping of the face, he is rich enough to afford a pod.

Albatros: He's aboard the Oz 9. With this crew. Still feeling envious?

LBF: At least he will sleep until Cal goes poof poof.

Albatros: And who do we have to blame for Cal's current active status?

LBF: I had to do it! I am an assassin!

Albatros: You're an idiot.

LBF: Perhaps. But I am also "cute," ehrrrrrr?

[footsteps]

LBF: You know, we have met before....

Albatros: I very much doubt that.

LBF: Well, until very recently, you forgot you had a "husband."

Albatros: I can still hear the quotes.

LBF: Fine! All I am saying is your memory is not to be trusted. But we have met before. In a laboratory. My memory of it is hazy like Vaseline, but I know it.

Albatros: "Hazy like Vaseline"?

LBF: Hazy *and* smeary.

Albatros: Challenged memory or no, I'm sure I'd remember you.

LBF: Because I am cute?

Albatros: No. Because I would have killed you in some very inspired and creative way, and THAT I would remember. Can we get on with this?

LBF: *Après vous, madame.* [walking] I am remembering ... it was cold. There were many people lying down and miserable. Ah... perhaps a holiday on an English beach?

Albatros: Stop. We have never met. I made it a practice to avoid other assassins after Lady Trout took over the Guild. I am NOT doing that stupid “secret” handshake.

LBF: You mean this? [whipping, slapping, silly noises]

Albatros: Yes. It’s absurd. How exactly is doing all that every time we meet supposed to keep our identity secret? Plus it takes forever. Yes, all right, all right, you can stop now.

LBF: But I am only half way through. I don’t like this part, though; you have to do it with your eyes closed, and that just isn’t safe.

Albatros: Idiot. Drop the headphones before you choke on the leash, and let’s go.

[headphones drop, walking, bump]

LBF: Ow! You see what I am saying?

[headphones still playing, sound of footsteps receding]

Tour Guide: As you approach the door, you’ll find the ‘lottery’ section, where ordinary citizens who won their way aboard now rest in their rather less fancy pods. These pods don’t rely on the MRDR protocol, but instead keep passengers suspended in stasis goo. How occupants will feel after 25 years is anyone’s guess. Pod 8540 contains Glenda Brukowski McRory, who famously fell to her death in a parachuting “accident.” Or did she....?

Narrator: Really? “Or did she dot dot dot?” Seriously, some people will let anyone into their ears. I mean, get some proper training! Learn diaphragmatic breathing at least — it takes endurance to sustain interest over a long expository section. It’s a marathon, not a sprint. Anyway, down in Dr. von Haber Zetzer’s lab ...

[sounds of the lab]

vHZ: Zo, young fellow-

Narrator: And that’s how you narrate an ellipses.

Colin: My god, it’s a madhouse in here! Is it possible to turn off at least some of the lights?

vHZ: Certainly not. I am bombarding you vis zenzations to keep you off ze balance. I notice you haf been scribbling in ze notebook from time to time. May I zee it?

Colin: There’s not much. You only just gave it to me.

vHZ: Yes, yes, but anyzink could be helpful at zis point, I am zinking.

Colin: You really have no idea what you've done to me, do you?

vHZ: No. But I am a zientist. We are better guessers than most people.

Colin: Not comforting. Here. As I said, there's not much there. I haven't had time.

Leet: Hey, Doc? Can I pet this?

vHZ: Probably no, young Leet. But zis notebook is full.

Colin: What?

vHZ: Zee? Every page.

Leet: It's super cute. And it's purring.

vHZ: Whatever it is, it is not purring, I assure you. Hands at your sides, please, Mr. Leet.

Leet: I can't. My biceps are too developed.

vHZ: Vell, cross your arms in front of you then.

[grunting]

Leet: Nope. Chest is too big.

vHZ: Friend Leet, your ztruggles vis your very imprezive physizque are intruding on my time vis Colin here. Perhaps you can find a quiet space vis nothing in it to alzo develop ze thoughts?

Leet: Can I take this thing with me? I won't hurt it.

vHZ: I am not zo concerned with *you* hurting *it*, my friend. Shush now, please.

[vague sounds of mechanical animal]

Colin: [alarmed] What are you doing? What are those?

vHZ: Now is ze time for being calm, I zink.

Colin: If you want me to be calm, waving ... electrodes at me isn't going to help!

vHZ: Zese are not electrodes, my boy.

Colin: They look like electrodes!

vHZ: OK, zey are, but only very zmall ones.

Colin: I knew it!

[more animal noises]

Leet: Ouch! Yeah, how *did* you know that? You can barely identify a hammer. Or a doorknob. You must have a really strange house.

Colin: Yes, it has servants in it. And I read the engine manual on the way here, so yes, I know what an electrode is. Now.

vHZ: You read ze entire manual of ze engine vwhile ve vere valking hier?

Colin: Yes. So?

vHZ: Zo... it is very long. And complicated. Also in Farsi.

Colin: Oh, that was Farsi! I wondered why it was taking so long.

vHZ: Now. I am going to plug you into zis machine. Vy not read.... Eh.... Zis vile you are waiting for me to finish?

Colin: The Ethics of Experimentation and Other Bothers, by Dr. Friederick von Haber Zetzer. It's a manuscript.

vHZ: It is, and zo much trouble writink in ze English. Here is Mz Albatroz's red pen, perhaps a quick proofreading vile ve are vorking, mmmm?

Colin: Fine.

[tinkering machine noises, animal noises getting louder and more hostile]

Leet: Uhh... Doc?

vHZ: Not just at zis moment, my boy. Zum very fine calculations and calibrations happening. Ha! Zuch poetry, heh?

Leet: It's thecat?

vHZ: Not a cat, friend Leet, but a highly zophisticated reconnaissance machine. Viz fur. Makes it nicer for handling. Shushing now....

Leet: I think I made it mad.

[crackle of electricity]

Colin: You can't hook me to that, you must be insane!

vHZ: Not at all. Ve need to bring all ze powerz to ze zurface while we are in zis safe space, you zee? Then ve shall know vis vat ve are dealink. Ready?

Colin: Wait!

[crazy animal noises]

Leet: Doc! Look out!

vHZ: Pull!

Narrator: For the next several minutes, things got pretty noisy in Dr. von Haber Zetzer's lab. Whatever-it-was that Leet was trying to pet finally had enough and jumped out of his arms and onto Colin's back, just as Dr. von Haber Zetzer administered the shock. Colin's powers did emerge, only with even less control than the doctor had hoped for. Lights dimmed all over the ship, which isn't unusual; all the instruments on the bridge started spraying sparks, which also isn't terribly unusual, but the

aromatherapy went nuts, dumping virtually every scent into the ventilation system. Olivia led the coughing, choking crew to the doctor's lab, which at least has oxygen tanks in it.

Madeline: What the hell is going on in there? Olivia, can you see what's happening?

Olivia: I can't, I'm afraid. The lab circuitry is all buzzing and popping, and I can't get in. Door's sealed as well. Oh, hang on, stand back!

[explosion, whoosh of air, door flies open. Leet, Colin and vHZ come out coughing]

Jessie: My god, what the hell were you up to in there?

Colin: Yes, I'm fine, thank you for asking.

Madeline: Is everyone all right?

vHZ: Yes, we are good, Captain Madeline. Just a little scorched und zat. Alzough, I feel a bit dizzy. I belief I vill just sit hier a moment.

Leet: That was so cool.

Olivia: You're all right, aren't you, dearest? Symmetry intact?

Jessie: There's a lot of smoke pouring out of there. Is anything on fire? Ehhhh... I hear something. Something's moving in there!

Albatros: We're all out here. Doctor, what's alive in there?

vHZ: Nothing. There is nothing "alive" in there, not in a ... biological sense.

Albatros: Then what the hell is coming towards us?

LBF: Allo? Who is it?

Joe: Hello.

Everyone: Jesus!!

Narrator: Jesus! Woo! Sorry, that was unexpected. So as we close out episode 25, the crew has just grown by one basically fictional character. Who, exactly, is *this* Joe? Is he real? A machine? A figment of the crew's aromatherapy-addled imaginations? I'd say stay tuned to find out, but chances are we'll never get a truly satisfactory explanation. In the meantime, the cat-like thing Leet was attempting to pet has disappeared, and the jolt of electricity through the ship disrupted both Cal and the 778 repair bot babysitting him. If that's good news or bad news for the crew, well...we'll just have to wait and see.

You've been listening to:

Bonnie Brantley as Jessie

Aaron Clark as le Bichon Frise

June Clark Eubanks as the Albatros

Richard Cowen as Leet

Tim Sherburn as Colin

Kevin Hall as the Tour Guide

Shannon Perry as Madeline and Olivia

Eric Perry as Head 1, Dr. von Haber Zetzer, and ... Joe???

And me, Richard Nadolny, as your Narrator

Our music was composed and performed by John Faley. Our artwork is by Lucas Elliott, and Oz 9 is written and produced by Shannon Perry.

Don't forget: the WiFiSciFi Live event is happening in April 2020, and you can be a part of it. Six podcasts, including *Girl in Space*, *9th World Journal*, *Moonbase Theta Out*, *Relativity*, *Sage & Savant*, and yours truly *Oz 9*, will be taking the stage in Seattle, Washington, for one unforgettable evening. Help us make it happen by contributing to our Indiegogo. You'll get some great benefits as well as helping bring podcasting to an even bigger audience. Support independent audio drama; go to wifiscifi.org for more details and a link to our fundraising page.

Until next time, space monkeys, Narrator out!