

Episode 86: Spike the Gargling Cow

Shannon Perry

OLD TIMEY WESTERN SALOON

The player piano is playing again. We hear some Old-West sounds, horses making horse noises in the distance, the occasional far-off gun shot, mumbles of conversation, maybe a card game, boots and spurs, those funky half-doors saloons always have despite, you know, winter and stuff.

N2

What are we doing here?

NARRATOR

I was hoping we'd get a chance to hear more from the cowboy.

N2

You think he'll talk to you? He only had eyes for Colin, remember?

NARRATOR

Oh, I remember. I'm counting on it.

N2

Sometimes you make less sense than they do.

NARRATOR

Bite your tongue, Tour Guide. Get behind the bar.

N2

You want something to drink?

NARRATOR

Well, yes, but not right now. Grab the McCallans, though; we might be waiting a while. *McCallans*, not McCallums. Oh hell, grab them both, why not? If I know anything about Colin after all this time, it's that the lure of that martini will be irresistible. He's just got to find the right key combination.

N2

Whoa! The bartender's back! I thought the cowboy shot him.

NARRATOR

He's animatronic, remember? Wow. That shirt he's wearing is enormous.

Sandwich machine appears with a hum and rumble.

NARRATOR

Good boy, Colin. Duck behind the bar,
quick! And stay quiet.

With a yell, Colin tumbles out of the machine.

COLIN

You could at least try to cushion the
landing. Ahhhhhhh, excellent! I'm
back!

The saloon doors open, boots and ringing of spurs.

COWBOY

Buy you a drink, pretty lady?

COLIN

I do wish you'd stop calling me that.
Reminds me far too much of childhood
tea parties with my mother. But I
wouldn't mind another of your fine
martinis.

COWBOY

That image of childhood is mighty
disturbin', sweetheart, but lemme
rustle you up a cocktail to kick some
dirt over the memory.

COLIN

Yes, thank you.

BARTENDER

Nobody's making cocktails here but *me*.

COWBOY

I thought I shot you.

BARTENDER

There's a reason this here joint is
called the Bad Penny Saloon, cowboy.
You go on and see if you can't poke an
apology out of your mouth hole, and
we'll carry on.

COLIN

"Poke an apology out of your mouth
hole?"

BARTENDER

It's possible our lines are a touch inauthentic. Just go with it.

COLIN

As long as the gin tastes real, I couldn't care less.

COWBOY

You here for a side quest?

COLIN

Good god, no, whatever that is. I'm here to get staggeringly drunk, slide to the floor amidst the sawdust and the peanut shells, cradling a bottle of vermouth and another of gin like my own sweet twin babes, and perhaps sing a sea shanty until I pass out.

BARTENDER

You gotta love the classics, but the machines don't bring you here to point your hand-stitched goat ropers at my ceiling.

COLIN

Is that something I'm likely to do?

COWBOY

He means you're not here to get drunk and fall on the floor. No, this here bar is where you come for a bit of cryptic conversation with someone standing in an illuminated circle and get assigned a side quest.

COLIN

If I let you call me "pretty lady" again, will you shut up about quests? Besides, no one here is standing in a circle.

BARTENDER

Not to be contrary, but my stovepipes do have a certain glow to 'em.

COLIN

(pause, sigh) I never realized how lovely it was to live in a time and place where I understood nearly

everything that was said to me.

COWBOY

Stovepipes are a kind of long boot.
Goat ropers are short boots. Our
bartender leans a touch heavy on boot-
based metaphors. His are aglow cause
he is standing-

COLIN

(interrupting) -is standing in an
illuminated circle, yes, thank you.
How is anyone going to know that if
you're on the other side of the bar?

BARTENDER

Games ain't supposed to be easy.

COLIN

What do you mean, "games"? Stop wiping
that damn glass and fill it with
something!

COWBOY

Quit tickling the stemware and mix him
up an Amelia Earhart, heavy on the
rhubarb.

BARTENDER

I'd say you'd have to shoot me first,
but I'm already living on borrowed
shirts.

COLIN

I was going to ask....

BARTENDER

Look, fella, if you're here, it ain't
for the drinks or the company. You're
here for a side quest.

COLIN

I'm here because I fancied a fresh
drink and remembered the button
combination, that's all.

COWBOY

Sure as I'm standing here, that ain't
"all," but there's no harm in knocking
the dung off your boots and the dust
out your chaps and putting your spurs

up a spell.

BARTENDER

Hey! I found her! Imagine that. She was here all along.

COLIN

What? WHO?

BARTENDER

Amelia Earhart. [sound of a glass being set on the bar] Guess we can call off the search.

BARTENDER and COWBOY laugh.

COLIN

(sighs) Leet would have loved you.

COWBOY

Oh, he sure did! How is that big fella? We miss him down here!

BARTENDER

That's a fact. I need to thank him for the generous gift of all his shirts, since our trigger-happy cowboy here keeps plugging holes in mine.

COLIN

Wait — he knew about you? About all this? HE KNEW WHERE HIS SHIRTS WERE?

COWBOY

Now hold on one cow-pat campfire — he's off on his side quest, ain't he?! Boy, howdy, he was a cracker! Remember when he busted Doc's password and stole all the nitrous oxide to spike the aromatherapy machine?

BARTENDER

Oh, hells yeah. Damn, it was fun to watch you breathers lose your bedrolls!

COLIN

WHAT.

Machine arrives and Mrs Sheffield, Dr. Theo, Jessie, and Greg tumble out, hollering and bickering.

COLIN

Where the hell did you all come from?

BARTENDER

You all who?

COWBOY

Yeah, he does this from time to time —
talks to his invisible friends.

COLIN

What are you talking about? *I'm* the
one who's invisible!

COWBOY

Maybe a little less *sparkle* in the
next Amelia, if you catch me,
bartender.

BARTENDER

Mmmmm hmmmmmm...

JESSIE

Where the hell's the McCallums??
Colin! Ask him!

COLIN

One of my invisible friends would like
a McCallums.

BARTENDER

No can do, Hopalong. Both McCallums
and McCallans are under the bar with
the narrators-ow!

Sound of the narrators hitting the bartender.

JESSIE

Don't care, blah blah blah, what else
you got with no "e"?

COLIN

What else hails from north of
Hadrian's?

BARTENDER

Let's see...Bruichladdich,
Craigellachie, Laphroaig, Glenugie,
Caperdonich, Teaninich, Tamdhu, or
Royal Lochnagar.

DR THEO

I don't know whether to order or
perform the Heimlich maneuver.

JESSIE

No Mannoehmore or Knockdhu?

COLIN

Shall I attempt the names, or will
just spitting on the bar do?

BARTENDER

It's the 1800s here, Hoss. Whatcha see
is what we got.

JESSIE

Right. Gimme a Caperdonich, and don't
skint on the pour.

COLIN

That one, please. Make it a double.

GREG

I'll take a brown gargle with a soft
calf slobber on top.

COLIN

I am absolutely not saying any of
that. What the hell did you just
order?

GREG

Coffee with cream. Go on, it's era-
appropriate slang; see if he
understands.

COLIN

My god. One- what was it? Something
horrifying...

GREG

Brown gargle.

COLIN

(slight gag) Brown gargle...

BARTENDER

Mmm hmmm.... canned cow?

GREG

Soft calf slobber. I'm taking some

liberties here, but I think he'll get it.

COLIN
This is the most appalling conversation.

COWBOY
It's your imagination that's spittin' it up, Calamity James.

COLIN
No canned cow. Soft calf slobber.

BARTENDER
HMMMMMMMM..... creative. I like it.

DR THEO
We should consider collaborating on a writing project, Greg.

GREG
Uhh.....

MRS SHEFFIELD
(speaking from a distance) This is odd.

JESSIE
What's odd is I've been in a bar for a full minute and a half, and I'm still clutching empty air instead of a dram of whisky.

GREG
Did you know a dram is actually a unit of avoirdupois weight equal to 1/16th of an ounce OR a unit of apothecaries' weight equal to 1/8 ounce?

DR THEO
You see? You'd be a worthy side-scribe to assist me in my literary endeavors.

COLIN
Quick with the drinks, my good man, and spike the gargling cow, if you would. My friends are thirsty and god-awfully dull.

BARTENDER

As you wish.

MRS SHEFFIELD

Anyone at all interested in the
oddness taking place over here?

Bartender sets down two drinks.

BARTENDER

Whisky, no "e," and a brown gargle
with a punch.

DR THEO

Order me an Elder Stateswoman, would
you, Colin?

JESSIE

(suggestive) Dr Theo, you sniffing for
a bit of hochmagandy?

COLIN

Uhhhhh.... I can ask if they have one
handy.

JESSIE

You do that, Colin. You go on and ask.

GREG

"Hochmagandy" - primarily jocular
Scottish slang referring to
fornication.

COLIN

Ah. Never mind. But I am a bit
disappointed in you, Doctor.

DR THEO

An Elder Stateswoman is a cocktail: 2
ounces gin - Gray Whale specifically -
1 ounce elderflower liqueur, 2 ounces
grapefruit juice, top with soda,
garnish with a sprig of lavender.

COLIN

If I'm not mistaken, this
establishment mainly offers cirrhosis
on the main floor and syphilis
upstairs. Do you really expect they
have elderflower liqueur and lavender
sprigs?

BARTENDER

One of your buddies is hoping to wrap his lips around an Elder Stateswoman, huh?

COLIN

I guess we're going to milk this rich vein of humor a bit longer.

MRS SHEFFIELD

This isn't a player piano.

DR THEO

It clearly is, Mrs Sheffield.

MRS SHEFFIELD

A player piano, Dr. Theodore, requires a roll. This piano has none.

COLIN

What are you suggesting?

COWBOY

Well, I hadn't suggested anything yet, sweetheart, but if you're asking-

COLIN

Oh, lasso your chaps or ... something. I wasn't talking to you.

DR THEO

She's right. This piano appears to be playing entirely without a roll. And without the aid of the pneumatic mechanism that operates the keys.

MRS SHEFFIELD

Yes, thank you for verifying. Terribly helpful.

JESSIE

Do you two ever not bicker? Lemme see that. Wooof! (she sits, coughs) This piano bench cushion could use a beating.

MRS SHEFFIELD

Do be careful with the furnishings, mmmmm? That dust is probably three-quarters horse dung.

COLIN

Did you all forget we're actually aboard a modern age spaceship, and not back in the mid-1800s? The piano is probably run by computers.

COWBOY

Boy, howdy, you really have slipped the fence and gone off the plantation, ain't ya? Spaceship!

BARTENDER

A few too many kicks in the ol' head-cheese from hi-yo Silver, huh? One elder stateswoman.

Sets glass on bar.

COLIN

Shut up.

BARTENDER

If your "friends" are kicking up a ruckus about our self-playing piano, you let 'em know that there piano is played by none other than the ghost of Stagecoach Mary.

COLIN

I beg your pardon?

BARTENDER

Mary Fields was the second woman in the US to carry the mail, and the first woman of color. Six foot tall and handy with a rifle. Sadly, more a plunker than a pianist, but she's learning.

JESSIE

A ghost. It's a ghost playin' this piano. Ehhhh, begging your pardon, Miss Mary. You keep on. Oh, hell, what's the glowing circle about?

COWBOY

Well, looky there. One of Colin's invisible friends just got themselves a special Stagecoach Mary side quest!

JESSIE

Oh HELL.

COLIN

You believe in ghosts, but not my friends. Excellent. You can see me, you could see Leet – why can't you see anyone else?

MRS SHEFFFIELD

I suspect our dear deluxe *chesterfield* with bonus padding did a bit of monkeying about with passwords. We may find Leet's signature in lots of places as we explore the ship, eh?

COWBOY

I reckon one of your invisible friends is positin' a theory, so you just let me know when it's quiet.

COLIN

She's done. Yes?

MRS SHEFFFIELD

Mmmm.

COWBOY

Our mutual friend Chester the Jester did mention he was leaving some "surprises behind to keep life interesting." Now, I suspect Stagecoach Mary has something to say.

Thunderous key combo.

JESSIE

Jesus! Hey, someone tell her I'm sorry for shoving in on her piano bench.

Forgiving tinkle. (now, *there's* a hash tag) "Don't Shoot the Piano Player" begins to play.

MRS SHEFFFIELD

That's "Don't Shoot the Piano Player."

COWBOY

I'm sorry, Mary; you know that was just a bad ricochet. I was aiming at him.

"You Lie Like a Bearskin Rug" plays on the piano.

BARTENDER

Oooooo, that's "You Lie Like a
Bearskin Rug." BURN.

COWBOY

Rude.

DR THEO

So much for colloquial authenticity.

JESSIE

So, this is how she communicates?
Through the titles of ancient ragtime
music? This is going to be a slow
conversation.

GREG

I have a pretty hefty database on
ragtime.

JESSIE

Of course you do. [sarcastic] 'Cause
that's useful.

GREG

IT IS NOW.

Piano launches into "Into the Swamp"

BARTENDER

Got kinda quiet in here. Your
"friends" having a jaw-rattle?

COLIN

Uhhhhh... yes? "Jaw rattle." That
sounds painful. Which it actually is,
so I suppose that works.

COWBOY

Don't recognize that piece, Mary.

GREG

"Into the Swamp" by [Thomas Golding]

JESSIE

AH, HELL.

COLIN

Apparently it's "Into the Swamp."

BARTENDER

Mary, you are quite the jokester. Not sure where you're gonna find a swamp within 500 miles in any direction.

MRS SHEFFIELD

Maybe you're some sort of reptilian midwife for dear Albert? Doula to the Denizens of the Deep?

JESSIE

Hilarious. Some long-dead animatronic ghost tinkles on the piano, and I'm supposed to go yank a baby with massive teeth and a bad attitude from a giant, vicious space-alligator's nethers?

GREG

Now, hang on. We don't know what the side quest is, exactly.

JESSIE

Thank you.

GREG

It could be to collect eggs from the rabid egrets.

JESSIE

You're enjoying this!

GREG

Maybe next time you'll think twice about replacing my voice recognition door lock with a key code.

JESSIE

Come on, that was funny! You with those giant hooves trying to press the wee little buttons.

DR THEO

If it helps, I'll accompany you, Captain Jessie. Albert does seem to respond well to me.

JESSIE

[suspicious] Are you making a move? Are you trying it on?

DR THEO

I'm sorry?

JESSIE

What's your angle? Do I have to read something, like draft two of your novel? Cause that ain't happening, mate.

DR THEO

No angle – just offering help to a teammate. Who hurt you?

MRS SHEFFIELD

Right. Jessie and Dr Theo, off to the swamp with you both, and see what Stagecoach Mary has in mind. Seriously, we're on page 15, and literally nothing has happened yet.

JESSIE

Now, just hang on to your sporran and Ghillie brogues, Bagpipe Breath; I don't take orders from you.

COLIN

I came here for a quiet drink. I'm not leaving until I have one.

BARTENDER

That there's your third Amelia Earhart.

COLIN

I said "quiet" drink. I wish to hear nothing more than the soothing rattle of ice in a glass.

BARTENDER

Well, then, you ain't gonna much like what I tell you next.

COLIN

Oh, god.

MRS SHEFFIELD

Now, see here. You can't simply ignore a sidequest. Ghost or not, she's an NPC, and you ignore those at your peril.

DR THEO

Mrs Sheffield, we're on a space ship,
not in a giant computer game.

MRS SHEFFIELD

Any reason the Oz 9 can't be both?

GREG

What do you know, Mrs S?

MRS SHEFFIELD

Nothing at all, but you have to admit
— as a theory, it's damn good.

COLIN

You think we're in some sort of giant
computer game?

BARTENDER

Hooo, boy. Maybe I better take that.

COLIN

Get your hand off my Amelia, or draw
back a bloody stump.

BARTENDER

All righty....

MRS SHEFFIELD

If I'm not mistaken, given the
illuminated hue rising up from behind
the bar, there's a second side quest
to be assigned here. Colin, I'm going
to assume that one's for you.

DR THEO

And I'm going to guess you've been
refusing to hear it.

COLIN

I'm tired. I don't want a sidequest.

COWBOY

Well, that's lucky, cause it ain't for
you.

COLIN

Thank god. How do you know?

COWBOY

We was told to wait for a man with a

voice that could make the sun rise at midnight.

DR THEO

Oh, dear.

BARTENDER

"Pipes like an organ," we hear, and a pipe like-

DR THEO

(hasty interruption) Yes, we can skip the rough-hewn homilies, thank you. What's the quest?

COLIN

He's here.

BARTENDER

Our man? With the golden pipes and the pipe of-

COLIN

STOP. Thank you. What's his quest?

GREG

Are you sure it's Dr Theo?

DR THEO

Who else could it be?

JESSIE

Ya gotta admit, he fits the bill.

DR THEO

Wait. How do you know?

JESSIE

See these weird flaps of skin on either side of my head? We humans call those "ears."

DR THEO

(relief) Oh, you're talking about my voice.

JESSIE

Aye, what did you think?

DR THEO

Could we just hear the quest?

BARTENDER

Whenever your imaginary friends are ready.

COLIN

If I imagined "friends" like these, my therapist could buy a summer home. On her own island. What's the quest?

BARTENDER

Follow the mustard. Hold the mayo.

silence

COLIN

Seriously.

COWBOY

That's it.

silence

MRS SHEFFFIELD

I knew it.

GREG

Why do I feel like he could say any old nonsense, and you'd claim you knew it all along?

MRS SHEFFFIELD

Because, my bi-chromatic comrade, I have a head full of nonsense-

GREG

Mmmm hmmm....

MRS SHEFFFIELD

-that is actually cryptic communication. One simply cannot expect animatronic equine to understand such complicated condimental conveyance. It appears Joe was right.

JESSIE

About what? The best way to wring out a mop is counter-clockwise?

GREG

I'm not bi-chromatic, and I'm sure as

hell not "equine"!

MRS SHEFFIELD

Joe was right about the sandwich machines. And you, my good fellow, are a zebra. Making you both bi-chromatic and equine. If linguistically challenged. With me, everyone.

JESSIE

You're doing it again. A little respect for my authority, all right?

MRS SHEFFIELD

Former-captain Jessie, are you aware that I saved your life no fewer than six times in the past two weeks, once as recently as this morning?

JESSIE

You're joking.

MRS SHEFFIELD

Were I you, I might check the location of the body tag you had the shipboard surgeon implant to keep the Albatros from removing you from the Oz 9.

JESSIE

What? All right, I will. (pause)
Later. Alone.

GREG

We have a shipboard surgeon?? How have I never met this person?

MRS SHEFFIELD

It's a machine.

DR THEO

You trusted a machine on the Oz 9 to implant a body tag?

JESSIE

Oh, I guess I could've packed a sandwich and put on a nice warm coat and let the Albatros shove me out an airlock.

Jessie, Greg, Colin, and Dr Theo start to bicker.

MRS SHEFFIELD

Shut.

pause. silence.

MRS SHEFFIELD

Up.

pause. more silence.

MRS SHEFFIELD

And that, my friend, is "authority."
In any event, the next time you
shower, if you still remember this
conversation at that distant point in
the future, you'll perhaps notice the
tag is gone and there's merely the
tired residue of an ancient plaster
that long ago fell away in despair and
redundancy. The tag the machine gave
you would have eventually released a
strong neurotoxin that would empty
your brain completely.

COLIN

How unfortunate we didn't catch it in
time.

JESSIE

Shut it. What's your point?

MRS SHEFFIELD

My point is that we're on the same
side. And from time to time I might
have knowledge you lack. Like now, for
instance. Joe and Lady Nibble Biscuit
discovered something critical which
they were unable to tell us.

DR THEO

What was it?

MRS SHEFFIELD

Unable. To. Tell. Us. Let's go find
Joseph. We can stop by the swamp on
our way.

They start to walk away. Sounds of setting glasses down,
footsteps, even quiet conversation from Jessie, Greg, Dr.
Theo, Mrs S, Colin.

COWBOY

Now hang on one hot tin of baked beans. That your idea of a cliffhanger?

DR THEO

I beg your pardon?

COLIN

We beg your pardon?

COWBOY

What a thrill – be sure to listen in next time to see if Colin has a mild hangover tomorrow!

MRS SHEFFIELD

What are you talking about?

COLIN

What are you talking about?

COWBOY

Where's the excitement? The thrill? The breathless anticipation? Y'all keep 'em waiting forever, least you can do is give 'em something to wait for!

JESSIE

Did Olivia fry your circuits or something? You're talking haggisburgers. Oy, did I just invent a new street food?

BARTENDER

Now, Clyde, calm down. Not every episode has to end with some crazy-

Gunshot

BARTENDER

Goddammit, Clyde! This was one of my favorite shirts!

Bartender falls.

COWBOY

Now THAT'S a cliffhanger. Will he make it or bleed his last right here on the floor of the Bad Penny Saloon? (pause)

All right, y'all can giddyap on outta here now. You're welcome.

They leave amidst stunned and mumbled conversation.

COWBOY

You can come on out now.

N2

(giggles, drunk) My legs don't work.

NARRATOR

(also drunk) Why do you have so many? You've got at least...eleven.

COWBOY

Odd number?

BARTENDER

(gasping) Call the doc!

NARRATOR

Oh, he doesn't need a doc. He just needs fewer legs.

N2

NOOOOOOOOOO! (sobs) Don't take my legs! My pants won't fit.

NARRATOR

(snorts laughter) How did you find 11-legged pants this morning, anyway? Wait. Did you have 11 legs this morning?

COWBOY

Bill, what do you say — got enough life left to run the credits? These two are useless.

BARTENDER

Good thing it's not the full cast. I'll start in case I die halfway: You've been listening to... Tim Sherburn as Colin Bonnie Brantley as Jessie David S Dear as Dr. Theo Bromae ("Dr. Theo Bromae" said sexily)

COWBOY

Kevin Hall as Greg

Sarah Golding as Mrs Sheffield
 Me, J Michael DeAngelis as Clyde the
 Cowboy, and introducing Pete Barry
 as... hang on.... WAS the Bartender.

NARRATOR

Don't forget the art and music and
 stuff. Did you do that bit yet? I like
 that bit. It's fun to say
 Looooooooooooooooocas Ellllllllioooooooooot.

N2

I'm Kyle Jones as your Narrator 2.

NARRATOR

And I'm Chris Nadolny Gourley as your
 Narrator.

BARTENDER

I'm not dead! Lucas Elliott does the
 artwork; John Faley composed and
 performed the theme, and Thomas
 Golding composed and performed the
 additional ragtime music for this
 episode. Sarah Golding is our dialog
 editor....uhhhhhhhh....

N2

I think he's dead.

Thump as N2 picks up an arm and lets it drop

N2

Seems pretty dead.

NARRATOR

You're drunk, Two. You can't spossibly
 make that deteriination (misspellings
 on purpose)

Same sounds as Narrator does the same re: arm.

NARRATOR

NOW he's dead.

COWBOY

Right. Chrisi Talyn Saje is our sound
 designer. Oz 9 is written -- and we
 use that term loosely -- by Shannon
 Perry.

NARRATOR

We'll see you next time, space
monkeys, and until then, ***never forget-***
(passes out).

N2

Now, THAT's a cliffhanger. (falls)